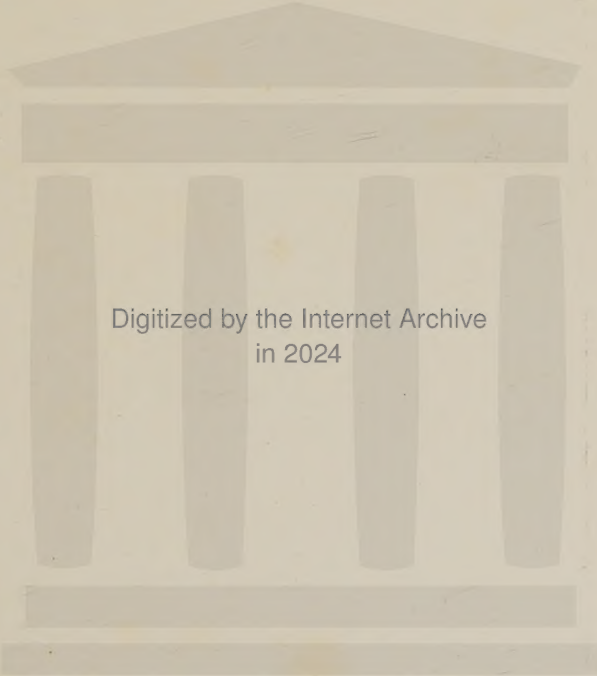


Our YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS
IN ENGLAND
By HORACE PORTER



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DOWN IT WENT ALL IN A FLUTTER . . . THE AVIATORS HANGING TO
THE RIGGING.

Our Aeroplane Scouts in England.

Page 71.

Our Young Aeroplane Scouts

(Registered in United States Patent Office)

In England

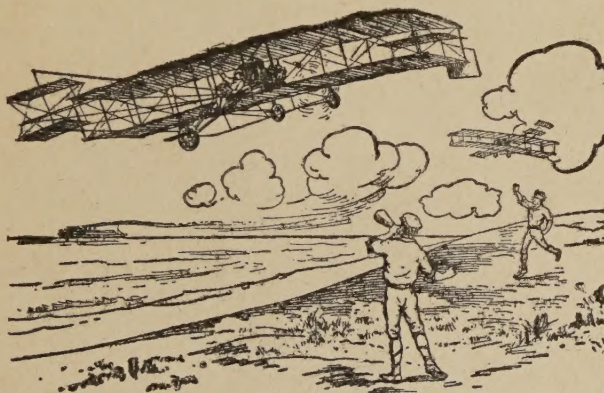
OR

Twin Stars in the London Sky Patrol

By HORACE PORTER

AUTHOR OF

"Our Young Aeroplane Scouts in France and Belgium," "Our Young Aeroplane Scouts in Germany," "Our Young Aeroplane Scouts in Russia," "Our Young Aeroplane Scouts in Turkey," "Our Young Aeroplane Scouts in Italy."



A.L. BURT COMPANY
NEW YORK.

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OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS IN ENGLAND

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CHAPTER I.

THE ZEPPELINING OF LONDON.

THE heart of London—now city of the night—was spouting electric beams. Terrific explosions rent the air, and all over the mighty metropolis antiaircraft guns were booming. Shells that spread a long trail of luminous red smoke hurtled aloft, in order to mark the position, for the gunners firing shrapnel, of the great gray menace that hovered with malign intent over the center of the British Empire.

“The Zeppelins! The Zeppelins! Out with the lights!” Mad shouts of men in fearsome hour, and with added crying of women and children. Out of the ground gloom and skyward shot the penetrating rays of the powerful searchlights at Woolwich, on the east; St. James Park, city center; Hampstead Heath, north, and the Crystal Palace, south

4 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

of the Thames. The upturned batteries at each operating point mixed thunder with the harnessed lightning.

In front of a recruiting station on King Street—which like all other well-known thoroughfares began and ended in darkness—were grouped a dozen or more bold spirits who could not be driven to cover if the world slipped a cog in its axis, all intent in silent observation of the wonderfully weird spectacle—the electric flashes and the long red trails playing about in the air.

One of these apparently undisturbed onlookers, a burly shape backed against the base of a shrouded lamppost, was lowly addressed once or twice during the thrilling exhibit by lesser weight companions as “sergeant”—and with questions as to what he thought of this or that lurid happening. To all of which he ventured no answer, evidently guessing that no reply was expected. He ventured a quiet remark of his own, however, speaking oversoulder to the shadow nearest his elbow:

“Billy, my boy, here’s another page for your red book.”

“And good-bye to our lone hope for a long breath with no powder in it,” voiced another shadow, closely allied with that called “Billy.”

“Another shire heard from,” commented the heavyweight prop of the lamppost. “Thought you left your kick in Egypt, Henri.”

"Cracky! Did you see that blaze?" This excited interruption coming out of the group on the sidewalk. One of the aerial bombs had hit something higher than the ground, vividly marked by a burst of flame.

"Keep your eyes open, my friend," grimly advised the sergeant, "and you can't miss the next one."

"There must be several of the gas cruisers up there," broke in a tall fellow, marked as a corporal, "but so far I've only glimpsed one."

"Considering the fact that they are working about eight thousand feet above you, you're lucky to get even that glimpse, thanks to the searchlights." The sergeant had failed to win a look for himself.

"I don't believe any of us will get even with you to-night, corporal," stated the "Billy" shadow, "for all the noise is going up now, and none at all coming down. The Zeps. are back-tracking sure."

"Out of the blow-up stuff, maybe," was the sergeant's idea.

"Ought to be," advanced the corporal; "they must have dropped a ton or two since eleven o'clock."

"And still some," suggested the "Henri" shadow.

All of a sudden the powder-burning by the repelling forces ceased, for the upper regions are shown clear of the sinister cylinder fleet, by the revealing operations of brilliant light reaching out from below and feeling around the sky, the continu-

6 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

ous ascension of more than a score of silvery criss-crossing ribbons.

Within the recruiting station can now be materialized the shadows of the late watchers in the outer gloom, and principally some old acquaintances of these readers—Billy Barry, Bangor, U.S.A., and his tried-and-true chum, Henri Trouville—the Young Aeroplane Scouts—along with Sergeant Scott, their staunch supporter in many a stirring period, at present drillmaster of volunteers, home command.

To the flying boys Zeppelin raiding was no strange practice, for they had been where the terrorcraft were in the building and where had been conjured famous plans for destructive forays by these gigantic airships. Yet even these aerial veterans were willing to admit that it had been something of a night in old London town.

"I have heard," said Billy, "that since our first travels by the gas route these big envelopes have been pushed up to a seventy-mile-an-hour gait, which is going some when you come to figure on the load carried."

"Perhaps so," replied Henri, "but as for me the plane is still the last word—motor and board, and the wind behind. That's how to fracture the speed limit."

"Doing seventy miles an hour, it didn't take that gang of bloody marauders very long to reach our

front door. Guess they started from Belgium, and that's only a little over two hundred miles." The sergeant was well posted as to war zone distances.

"Say, how do they set those bombs on the fall?" queried Corporal Higgins, to whom dirigibles were as remote a proposition as the dodo bird.

"Tell him, 'professor,' " urged Billy, with a mock bow to his chum.

"The bombs," explained Henri, "are discharged from tubes pointing downward from a steel plate in the floor of the airship. The bomb is furnished with a steel handle, and by means of this it is lowered into the tube. A bolt fitting into a hole in the bomb holds it in the tube. The marksman presses his foot on an electric button in the plate in the floor of the car and this withdraws the bolt, releasing the bombs. He can drop two bombs at once if he wishes, and the third two seconds later."

"Talks like a book," admiringly exclaimed the corporal. "But how about coming within a mile of the target?"

"Some of the good ones can hit a mark half an acre in extent," assured Henri.

"Which is some shooting from a high-flying Zep., eh, sergeant?" Billy passing the quip to the doughty officer.

"Blame me if it isn't," conceded that worthy, stifling a yawn, "but I think I could hit a bed just now if I tried."

"That's the target for me, old pard," laughed Billy, "but if Buddy here wants to wait for sunrise he is welcome to the choice."

"The dawn will not be lonely in London for want of me," retorted Henri. "I shall retire with the minority."

"Don't you fool yourself, youngster," admonished the sergeant, "you've been around with Britons enough to know that a scare like this isn't going to spoil their nerve. With the fireworks over, they'll sleep all right, and forget it."

"That's the truth, comrade, as straight as a string," proclaimed the corporal. "When that bunch of wreckers handed us the first little spill of torpedoes a week ago, I remember that my landlady gave the loud shout to little Jimmy to 'come in here quick or you'll be 'it and killed by one of them German bombs.' And what do you think the kiddy yelled back? Just this: 'I won't. Hif I've got to get killed, I want to 'ave the fun of hit.'"

"Here's to them!" declaimed Billy, lifting a hand in imaginary toast; "to present company and some of the King's own that came our way in other lands."

"To the Union Jack and the Tricolor!" gallantly supplemented Henri, that native son of France.

"To Old Glory!" fervently concluded the boy from Bangor.

"To bed!" drowsily wound up Sergeant Scott.

What a faraway, fiery trail the Young Aeroplane Scouts had blazed since the day they splashed a great seaplane into the Thames for Admiralty inspection! What adventures aloft and aground in France and Belgium, in Germany, in Russia, in Turkey! With the bronze of Egyptian campaigning still darkening their faces, with nerves steel-tempered, this war-seasoned pair rolled into the station bunks with no haunting fear of a next-day peril. The aerial bombardment the lads had just witnessed, as before stated, was not a novel exhibit to them.

As in former field experiences, Sergeant Scott continued to believe himself the specially constituted guardian of the flying boys—as long as they were on the ground. The bluff old warrior was still on the job when the trio recently came again within the sound of the Bow Bells, and while most of his time and attention were now necessarily given to the breaking in of awkward squads, he held Billy and Henri strictly to roll call.

The boys made a post-breakfast start up King Street to see how central London appeared after being "Zeppelined," and when they returned, in the early afternoon, were promptly apprised by their uniformed mentor that he had something particular to say to them.

"I've been looking for you everywhere, you young gadabouts," were the first words of the sergeant when he caught sight of the lads in the sta-

10 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

tion doorway. "What I've got to tell you is that the Big Eye of the Royal Flying Corps has at last located these quarters as the covering of a couple of windbeaters known as Barry and Trouville, and your game is at a big premium since the Zeps. have begun dropping into town the way they did last night. Where you've been?"

"Just roaming around to find out what that down-shooting amounted to," explained Billy. "Heard that lives were lost and a good many hurt, but we didn't notice very many big buildings with scars on them."

"Much you could see in a few hours' footing in a city as big as this," sniffed the sergeant.

"At least, we struck one place that had the earmarks of a considerable shakeup," asserted Henri, "and it wasn't very far from the Bank of England, either. Here's a bit of glass from the shattered front of an office building over that way."

"Small picking, my lad, when you remember what you've seen in the war-ruining line—at Arras, for instance," recalled the veteran. "But now to our meat," he resumed. "It's another old story repeated—you boys are going out of my reach again, at the call of the air." The grizzled soldier coughed away a little strangle in the throat, and gruffly added: "Haul out your kits and follow the corporal."

CHAPTER II.

QUICK CALL TO ACTION.

THE corporal's lead finally guided the Young Aeroplane Scouts into the high-ceilinged interior of a massive structure perforated by a couple of thousand windows. The non-commissioned officer held to the soldier's privilege of keeping on his cap, but the boys were sufficiently impressed with the surroundings to uncover their heads and keep a weather eye on the people passing in and out of the long corridor.

"I've just found out," stated Billy, in half-tone, "that I have the power of becoming invisible at will. Already two Admiralty lords have gone by, and neither of them saw me."

The corporal honored the jest with a broad grin.

The attention of Henri, however, had just then been attracted to the outcoming, from the nearest door, of a silk-hatted figure wearing a face that seemed familiar enough to tune a lost chord of memory.

"Where have I seen him before?" mused the boy.

12 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

"Ah! I have it," speaking aloud and smiting one hand with the other. "It's one of the seaplane inspectors who asked Billy and me if 'we went with the machine' if they bought it."

"What's ailing you, Buddy?" questioned the Bangor lad. "Hope you haven't taken to talking to yourself."

Without stopping to enlighten his flying partner as to his mental balance, Henri quickstepped the corridor and succeeded in intercepting the leaving movement of the man who had excited his interest.

"Good day, sir," was Henri's form of address; "are you still interested in seaplanes?"

The usual British reserve was first turned on the venturesome youth, but speedily melted in the light of recognition. Billy and the corporal had by this time moved within earshot, curious to learn what their companion meant by his extraordinary performance.

"Well, or I am sadly mistaken, it is one of the young experts who showed us the big machine at the docks. It is quite awhile ago, son, but I well remember the occasion. But what now, are you charged with, high treason or low spirits?" The query was accompanied by a humorous glance at the corporal, presenting ramrod pose. "And there's the other airman, too. How do you do, Mr. Flyer?"

"You acted that time, sir, as though you wanted us to stay with the plane," reminded Henri. "If

the desire still sticks we're out of a job just now."

"Not for long," insisted the corporal, aching to get into the conversation with the authority, known to him by sight and reputation. "They's been sent for," he earnestly continued, "and we're just waiting to be called in."

"Thank you for the information, officer," answered the authority with a quizzical smile; then, turning to Henri, he directed: "Go to room one hundred and five" (pointing to the next gallery), "and tell the secretary, Mr. Morton, that you are there to await Alkire." ("Sir Charles," muttered the corporal.) The non-com., however, finished with that, for "Sir Charles" politely advised him that he could return to station duty, forthwith.

On the way to the apartment specified, Henri paused to admire a magnificent marine painting at the right of the curving balustrade, and arrived at 105 door just in time to hear Billy telling somebody inside that "the duke sent us up here." "'Alkire,' he said was his name," prompted the last arriving chum in a stage whisper. "I mean that Alkire sent us," instantly announced the Bangor boy, accepting the cue without the least embarrassment.

The guardian of the portal, a sturdy specimen of British youth, bestowed a blank stare upon the visitors, which, however, failed of wilting effect.

"Is Mr. Morton in?" asked Henri, hoping to see the doorkeeper in action.

14 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

"Are you looking for a job?" was the return question.

"We're not after yours, anyhow," positively assured Billy, who was not always a model of patience.

This last was evidently too much for the dignity of the young Briton. He waved invitation to the boys to enter, indicating with another hand-wave a settee, in which they might be expected to subside. Following the murmuring of some sort of conference in the next room beyond, Billy and Henri received a beckon to proceed into the sanctum, where their welcome was much more cordial, extended by a six-footer with a slight bend in his shoulders, who arose from behind a long table stacked high with ribbon-wound papers.

"I understand that you are protégés of Sir Charles," pleasantly observed the man behind the table.

"As to that, you'll have to ask the gentleman himself," advised Billy. "He just told us to come here and wait."

"We're aviators," interposed Henri, "and some time ago, in our line of business, we had the honor of meeting the one you call 'Sir Charles;' he didn't forget it when we ran across him a little while ago, and that is why we are here."

"Airmen, eh? We have plenty of room for that profession, I assure you. But you, both of you,

seem a little short of years for much experience. Amateurs, I presume."

Billy eyed the speaker from under contracted brow. "For all the actual pay we have received from any of the battling nations for whom we have worked I suppose we are not of the professional grade. Otherwise, I believe we can qualify."

"We've flown over a good bit of the map, sir," modestly amended Henri.

Mr. Morton with growing interest took new measure of the callers. "You have had experience, I would now infer," he said, adjusting glasses to aid short-range vision.

"Write to the postmasters at Petrograd, Warsaw, Hamburg, Strassburg, or some of the other burgs for our credentials," laughingly suggested Billy.

Before the smiling secretary could frame an answer to this banter, the chat was interrupted by the incoming of Sir Charles and three companions, two of whom, like the leader, were in civilian attire, the third wearing the military khaki and showing a much-tanned countenance.

The latter, quickly perceiving the presence of the boys, turned to Sir Charles with the laconic interrogation: "Are these the buckies?" The reply was a nod of assent.

"So you are the young men about whom Major Canby has been raving?" further queried the soldier, giving Billy and Henri the keen "once-over."

16 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

"Major Canby!" cried Billy. "It was Canby that rode with us from the sultan's town to Egypt. He's a gritty one, I am here to tell you. Is he in London?"

"Not in person, but by letter," replied the man in khaki, "and the letter to his brother, the major, of the Royal Flying Corps."

"That accounts for it all," decided Henri, slapping his knee for emphasis. "He's given us the hurrah as sure as shooting."

"This is the corps kingpin," stated Sir Charles, by way of introducing the soldier to the flying boys, "Lieutenant-Aviator Morgan, to whom the skyline is no mystery."

The red was showing through the tan of the taciturn plane driver, and his gaze had wandered to a window offering the view of many lofty roofs.

"I am hardly worthy of this exploiting," he presently protested, "and, besides, there are some who say that we of the air service are less efficient than the searchlight as a protective measure against the Zeppelin night raiders."

"No one can argue away the great value of the aeroplane branch of the service," vehemently declared one of the two civilians who had accompanied Sir Charles into the room, a square-jawed, clean-shaven Member of Parliament, who never had an opinion that he was afraid to express.

"I am sure of one thing," sternly assented Lieu-

tenant Morgan, "if we could meet them at the coast before the light fails there'd be swift accounting, this way or that."

"The time will come, lieutenant," confidently predicted the aggressive M.P., "when the corps will have a chance to open some of those gas bags. And speed the day," he added, with a snap of the teeth.

"Allow me now, lieutenant, and hoping that they are willing volunteers, to congratulate the Royal Flying Corps upon the accession of a pair of aeroplane operators who own certificates of skill with never a blot. France has just contributed a dozen aviators to this service, all picked men, and here we have two more stars right to hand."

"Hand picked," chuckled Billy, solely for the benefit of his chum, as Sir Charles concluded his remarks.

"Guess we'll have to do as the plumbers do, make the best of the job for the boss," said Henri, noting that the company was about to disperse. "We hitch onto the lieutenant, of course."

"Wish then, he'd pull us into a first-class café." Billy had, as ever, a healthy appetite.

As if the "wish were a horse," that is just what the lieutenant did.

"I will not be treating you to this kind of thing very often," intimated the host of the occasion, "for under recent rule we stick as close as firemen

18 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

to aviation headquarters when the planes are down. But I am borrowing this evening a bit of time between twilight and nine o'clock to show you a feeding place where the lights are still burning."

The illumination of the restaurant, however, did not so distract the lieutenant as to prevent him from exercising certain precaution in the matter of telephoning some outside point. "They know where to find me in case anything breaks loose," advised the officer when he rejoined the boys at table, saluting, as he passed, another soldier who represented recent field activity with the exhibit of a leg swathed in bandages.

As night came on apace, the lowering sky above the great city was being swept by gigantic searchlights for Zeppelins, and the invasion of the café where the boys were dining grew to crowding point.

From somewhere, and high, in the outer gloom rolled the sonorous clang of a big bell. All sound of table service instantly ceased and lively conversation softened to a faint buzz. Lieutenant Morgan, lolling in his chair, suddenly assumed rigidly upright attitude.

There was a hasty movement near the main door of the café, and the name of the aviation chief was called aloud, by voice high-keyed and ringing.

CHAPTER III.

A THRILLING INITIATION.

THE startling summons of the husky subaltern, sporting a leather jacket and gauntlets, had instant response from the individual loudly named, with the Young Aeroplane Scouts in close pursuit. In a jiffy the four of them piled into a rakish locomobile chugging at the edge of the sidewalk, and the gauntleted messenger opened about everything that had to do with speed. A special policeman vociferated some sort of warning, which dropped fully a block short of hearing.

Miles of city streets receded like a mill-race behind the whizzing racer, and of fantastic aspect were the dim statues and monuments along the line of swift travel; the slow-moving busses, with red lights under the stairs, seemed tied fast to the ground, and the blue-shaded lamps in front of the theaters looked like lightning bugs in the passing. Even Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square, that used to blaze like a house afire, were a dark route this night, but the man at the wheel knew his Lon-

20 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

don, and the place of planes loomed high when he set brakes.

"What's up, Devlin?" demanded Lieutenant Morgan, who was on foot before the machine had fairly lost motion.

"A flash from the coast, sir," replied the guard of the hangars. "Ipswich has seen a shadow, I guess."

"Who's on duty?"

"Norcross, Nelson, Smith, Harrington, Hannagan, Melrose, and three or four of them French fellows, sir."

"Everything taut?"

"Right as a trivet, sir."

Striding through the arcade, the lieutenant opened and passed through a numbered door near the center of the arched gallery. When he came out, buckling belt and holsters around his waist, the guard was again addressed.

"Two new ones for the corps, Gabe," pointing to the boys.

"Them kids, sir?"

"The very pair. You'll be swearing by them before long, Gabe."

"Or at them, maybe, sir."

"You've given the order, Gabe?"

"The yard is humming, sir."

"Fix these young men with sweaters, Gabe, ready for a night run. They'll be outfitted to-morrow."

"They're not going on any big swing 'round when they've just joined, sir?"

"Right off the bat, Gabe; these fellows are among the best in the business."

Notwithstanding all this talk was of the rattle-off kind, and all the time his tongue was going the lieutenant was also occupying himself with buttons and buckles, revolver inspection, and loading and other personal briefs of flight preparations, the boys were jointly wondering why there was indulgence in even five minutes' delay, after the haste just previously exhibited.

They did not know then that in a tower cutting the clouds above the aerodrome there was a tense listener for the second wireless wave of alarm which would warrant signal to raise the winged resisting force of first reservists—the battle cruisers of the Royal Flying Corps.

Scout biplanes already were flitting in the sable recesses of the limitless canopy of night, but the bomb-laden, cannon-carrying craft of double spread and triple bulk lay in leash, awaiting the command of emergency.

The lieutenant was not wasting time, as the boys imagined. However, the staccato-like sentences passing between himself and the guard, Devlin, ceased, and both moved beyond the archway, where they could turn eye aloft with unobstructed vision. The objective point of upturned gaze was a disc of

22 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

light hardly larger than a handbreadth, and apparently without dependency for its fixed position between earth and sky.

To the extent that Billy and Henri were posted as to the proceeding, it might have been a star disobeying the laws of gravity.

Billy endured the silent and mysterious vigil to the limit of eager curiosity, when he edged to the elbow of the guard, and whispered desire for a bit of special information.

Devlin, without turning his head, as softly replied: "If that there ball shifts its color, I'll be a lonely man in a very few minutes."

Billy backed away to work on the riddle that had been handed to him, before passing it along to his chum.

Henri, it would appear, had been making an inquiry on his own hook—seeking the ear of the lieutenant, who gave a clearer explanation than Devlin.

When the boys compared notes, they were tolerably sure that if the silvery ball showed red, their old trade would be coming back to them with a bounce.

Their moment of reflection was interrupted by the sudden appearance from the vast vault of darkness of a slender, wiry figure trimmed for any sort of air altercation, long or short range, carbine backstrapped and revolvers in belt. In the dim downcast

of the arch-light Billy and Henri had their first view of Adam Norcross, the hero of many cloud combats, and with whom the young American was destined soon to be associated in a thrilling adventure.

Though the red did not show that night in the tower, and the hangars generally were not emptied, two armored aeroplanes took the air just in advance of dawn, on special mission, which might be expected to range somewhat beyond the patrol lines assigned to this central station.

To this contingency and prospect of going out of bounds Billy Barry and Henri Trouville owed their ascendancy over the regular service pilots in choice for steering duty on this expedition, settled by hasty conclusion, and not without some demur on the part of Norcross, in the rôle of observer, for which objection he later handsomely apologized to Billy.

When the high-powered machines made the rise almost vertically from the ground the drivers were the Young Aeroplane Scouts and the observers and swivel gunners none other than Lieutenant Morgan and the redoubtable Norcross, the latter sitting behind the Bangor boy.

Of the complete purport of the wireless message that started this flight, the pilots were wholly unaware, but when the big and silent city spread picture-like far below, and all noises were merged into

24 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

the sputtering motors and whirring propellers, the wheelmen had their order to steer by that indestructible guide-post, the Thames River, and coastward. The forty miles to the mouth of the river was a distance that counted for little as an accomplishment for the mechanical birds, such was their lightning onrush, and with the big turn at Southend, Billy and Henri were in familiar sailing course, not far from the line of their first and never-to-be-forgotten seaplane voyage from Dover to Ostend. The trend of their present flying venture was the same—towards the North Sea.

Break of day revealed to the aviators the battery point of Ipswich, from which fire had but a few minutes previously been drawn by German air scouts making daring reconnoitre in a couple of fast double-engined planes, which were even yet visible, tiny streaks crossing the gray curtain of the morning.

Our Young Aeroplane Scouts here received sharp orders to lift the machines they were driving to higher travel, for the dark red markings on the British war birds could hardly be distinguished by the gunners below, and anti-aircraft cannon were no respecters of persons and things subject to suspicion.

In instant pursuit of the Teuton marauders, and by reason of fog development in the further reaches above the watery expanse, the warplanes of the

Royal Corps severed company, and as the chase continued the pilots lost all conception of each other's whereabouts.

It was the warplane that Billy was driving which first closed in on the trail of one of the fleeing German machines, and it was an unexpected discovery made in clearing the edge of the fog bank. The air battle began immediately, and almost as soon as it started the machine gun of the British aeroplane jammed.

"Dive! Dive!" shouted Norcross to Billy.

The craft plunged in a swift curve, but the Germans, no less prompt, dived, too, and continued to fly around the British machine, which was hampered by the weight of the bombs it carried—being loaded and primed for bigger game. Billy, catching a level after the initial drop, set the nose of his big aeroplane shoreward, which solid refuge he then located a few hundred yards away. The British machine was not built for hydroplaning in troubled waters.

All the time Norcross kept firing his carbine until his supply of cartridges was exhausted and when it evidently occurred to him that an abrupt landing would be fatal to him and his pilot unless the percussion fuses were removed from the bombs. He coolly set about taking out the fuses and had just finished the task when he was stunned by a piece

26 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

of the propeller which had been knocked off by a bullet.

The Bangor boy knew that something had happened behind him, but the difficult landing required eyes and attention no other way than front. Hardly had the crippled craft skimmed the surf and settled on the chalky face of the promontory, when the atmosphere "upstairs" resounded with quick-shooting effects, indicative of continued hostilities. A newcomer had engaged the German foe, lingering too long in territory where he was not a welcome guest.

Billy, however, was not looking aloft at the moment. Finding the gallant Norcross all in a heap at the observer's end of the grounded aeroplane, the resourceful young pilot gave first aid by the application of a water-soaked handkerchief to an ugly cut on the dazed man's forehead. When the veteran flyer had recovered his scattered senses, he as quickly regained his feet, and, realizing there was still something doing above, strenuously insisted upon getting once more into the fray. But the young pilot shook his head in dissent, pointing to the damaged propeller as the cause of his reluctance.

The argument, though, was of brief duration, for, with a whir and a buzz, another aeroplane was making the downshoot, and a moment later skilful

landing. Henri and Lieutenant Morgan had arrived.

"Gave them as good as they sent," shouted the latter at sight of his comrade with the bandaged head. "And only the blasted fog saved them," added the officer with high note of disappointment in the last declaration.

"I see that your scow got a dent or two in the armor," observed Billy, who had a quick vision for aeroplane scars.

"Not a marker to the one over my left eye," interposed Norcross, before the lieutenant could admit that there had been a close squeak between them and a hulling.

A far-off booming of cannon brought the aviators to listeners' attitude.

"The visitors are getting the honors of war up the coast," grimly predicted Norcross.

"And we came down here to catch a German submarine asleep," reminded Morgan with a short laugh.

"Scared to the bottom of the sea long ago," complained the wounded gunner, ruefully rubbing his aching head.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

"HAD it hammer and tongs, I'm hearing," was the address to our boys of Guard Devlin the morning after the late afternoon return of the four aviators, who were delayed by necessary repairs to the fractured plane propeller.

Billy and Henri, then having no desire for anything more on earth than to sleep the clock once around again, were not inclined to be fluent in speech, and still less disposed to get up.

"I'm also hearing," persisted "Gabe," undaunted by drowsy rebuff, "that you fellahs are as good as signed for the war season after yesterday. Do either of you, now, happen to be Irish from awhile back? I'm thinking that 'Barry,' anyhow, sounds like it."

Devlin heard a command from somewhere, and was off before he got an answer out of the boys or any assurance that they proposed to do anything else but slumber. It required a vigorous leg-pulling later at the hands of the rejuvenated Norcross to arouse

the young aviators from their dreams of air conquest.

"You'll feel all right when you get outside of some breakfast," was the consolation extended by the sleep-breaker, as he playfully pulled the blinking youngsters out of their bunks.

"It seems to me," yawned Billy, "that it's precious little chance we've had to forget work, but, all the same, save our memory when it comes to eating."

At the corps mess the young aviators sat with quite a number of their kind and profession, and it was evident that Norcross had given the company full benefit of his first experience with the new members. All of the noted airmen present at the morning meal were particularly cordial, and the mighty Hannagan inflicted a handgrip upon the boys that made them wince.

Henri immediately struck up a special acquaintance with the Parisian plane-master, Demonet, who had just come over to "help out" his comrade allies during the Zeppelin raids. The two had a patter in French that seemed to do both of them good. When told that Billy was an American, Demonet recalled several young men of that nation to whom he had given instruction in one of the leading aviation schools in France, at Pau.

"Henri and I had our start as air students on a sand-pit in old N. J.," laughed Billy, "and I'll bet

30 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

you never saw such a circus as we put up along about then. But, say, professor, tell us about that scientific course you gave my fellow countrymen."

The Frenchman showed a broad smile at the title conferred, and then went on to explain how aviators were made at Pau.

"The candidates are put through eight classes," he said. "The first works with a short wind machine called penguin. It has only 25-horse-power—not enough to lift it from the ground. The sole aim is to accustom the learner to regulate the motor and control the levers as in an automobile."

"Light ground work," commented Melrose, who had turned a listening ear to the talk.

"Sufficient requirement, however," continued Demonet, "that no one can pass from one class to the next until he has shown his aptitude. It saves accidents, you know.

"The second class uses a 35-horse-power penguin, also not strong enough to rise into the air. Then a machine is given the pupil in which he can scarcely leave the earth. If he does he skims along in straight lines."

"Some system, that," observed Billy. "Buddy and I got it all in a lump."

"Especially the lump," added Henri.

"The fourth class," proceeded the instructor, unmindful of interruption, "is intrusted with straight-line flying on a six-cylinder machine capable

of rising about a hundred feet. The fifth contingent practices turning in an aerodrome, so that pupils become thoroughly experienced in wheeling to right or left."

"The sixth division undertakes larger circuits at greater heights on 50-horse-power machines. Cross-country flying and spiral ascents and descents to a height of 500 yards are the exercises of the seventh class."

"Ask the young man there," suggested Norcross with a nod at Billy, "about the art of making spiral descent in a busted machine."

"I am not talking about the finely finished product just now," mildly protested Demonet, "but let me testify that the last instructions we give in the courses at least put the student in the way of coming to the front. He must be able to fly for an hour at a time at a height of something like 7000 feet, fly triangularly across country, landing at two different places, returning to starting point within forty-eight hours. He must also make long distance flights to three different points and return."

"If I were on the board," judicially determined Billy, "the graduate should have his look-in for a certificate."

"Rather out of the run, after all," concluded the French aviator, "to be going back to the primer of flying among all these old birds, but it is just a

32 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

matter of national pride with me that we have sent so many good ones aloft to serve our cause."

"Talk 'shop' all you want to, comrade," genially remarked Harrington, the dean of the corps. "We all had to learn, some way or other."

"Hey, b'ys, you're wanted in quarters," called Devlin, largely framed in the doorway, and crooking a forefinger at Billy and Henri.

"There's something in the air," joked Norcross with the boys in their passing.

"Such things will happen when you're working around an aerodrome," retorted Billy, indulging in a jaunty swagger.

If the Young Aeroplane Scouts "went up in the air" in the next five minutes it was in the language of the street, not in a flying machine.

Lieutenant Morgan had a guest when the boys reached the chief's room, and in that fact lay the surprise for the incomers.

The visitor kept a position that concealed his face from the entering pair, and the officer appeared to be quietly amused at the situation.

In droll and drawling tone he began: "Mr.—ah—Molineaux, I believe, permit me to introduce——"

"Gee whizz!" interrupted Billy, with startled accent, as the stranger turned full face. "If it isn't Mr. Ardelle I'm in a trance!"

"Mr. Anglin!" in turn gasped Henri.

There was that indelible smile of both lip and eye that brought back with a rush the live-wire memories of former adventures in which these lads had participated, and in company with this self-same most eminent secret agent of France.

"Molineaux, if you please," gravely admonished the visitor, which affected gravity was belied by mirthful mouth and dancing humor in keen orbs of vision.

In the time space of about two seconds each of the boys felt the impress of a sinewy hand on the shoulder—caressing pressure—and a once familiar voice had the cadence of real hearty greeting.

"Anglin, Ardelle, Molineaux, or what not," said the owner of the voice, "I'm just the same to you, and you to me, as when we crawled out of a drain-pipe together in Strassburg and exchanged good-byes until the next shake-up."

Lieutenant Morgan had politely withdrawn from the immediate vicinity of the reunited trio, to "let them talk it out," as he explained when he resumed his seat and scrutiny of a parti-colored map outspread upon a large table in the center of the room.

"How did you get away from Roque?" inquired the French agent, who referred to his own arch-enemy and Germany's boss conspirator.

"He got away from us," promptly asserted Billy. "A building blew up in Warsaw before he intended

34 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

that it should, and our taskmaster took to the river. We have never seen him since."

"Wonder if he is still alive?" Henri put this question.

"Alive, but not 'still,'" smilingly replied the man of several or more names. "That this condition is true is the main reason why I am spending a few days in this grand city. I never travel for my health, you know."

"You don't think for a minute, do you, that Herr Roque is in town?" asked Billy, with a quick side-glance, just as though he were apprehensive of the unexpected appearance from some dark corner of the mentioned mystery man.

"Give me something easy," invited the French agent. "There have been some supposedly well-kept official secrets going astray, and that is what usually happens when Roque is around, either in person or at the pulling end of the string."

"You haven't told us yet how you picked up the trail of we two orphans among the footmarks of moving millions."

"A little bird told me," chuckled the successful trailer, patting the shoulder of the curious Henri—"a little bird by the name of Demonet."

"Twice the length of a sand-hill crane, that bird," laughed Henri. Something else then occurred to the boy that did not encourage banter. "Is this

just a social call?" The query was a trifle serious, and a shade of anxiety thrown in.

The Young Aeroplane Scouts had learned by experience that attracting the special interest of secret agents meant the traversing of some rocky roads, with mighty small favors for mileposts.

"Anglin, Ardelle, Molineaux, or what not" had a side-shaking fit of suppressed mirth before answering the lad who wanted to know what was coming. "I fear you do not think I am good company any more," he chided, "but surely you will not object to helping me enjoy my brief vacation here?"

"The same line of talk that doesn't get anywhere," put in Gilly—"Nobody home when you knock."

The French agent had joined Lieutenant Morgan at the table and engaged that officer in conversation audible only to themselves. Directly the boys were requested to come forward, and to learn what had been dealt to them by the council.

"You are going to spend the evening in society, my young friends," advised the lieutenant, "and, so, must mind your manners."

"And mind Mr. Anglin, too, I'm thinking," rather pertly added Billy.

"A gentle rule, my lad," assured the secret agent. "I haven't forgotten that I owe much to your wit and good-will, of timely exhibit in several instances,

36 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

where one shortcoming meant a short shrift for yours truly."

"But come now, Mr. Anglin," persisted Henri, "give us a little look-in as to the scheme you're expecting to put across."

"All you have to do, young gentlemen," softly intimated Mr. Anglin-Ardelle-Molineaux, "is to use your eyes, and show me, if you can, a face that doesn't belong in righteous company."

Billy and Henri traded glances of mutual understanding.

CHAPTER V.

AN ATTACK IN THE DARK.

THE vast restaurant of a big London hotel this night was illumined by the dazzling light of many candelabra, showing luxurious silverware, snowy napery and fifty waiters hovering around innumerable small tables occupied by supremely elegant diners.

"It takes more than a Zeppelin threat to jolt some of the Londoners off their perches." A hatchet-faced man, awkwardly sporting a monocle and a claw-hammer coat that did not exactly fit him, passed the low-toned comment to a well-groomed companion, as they stood for the moment as lookers-on of the brilliant scene.

"But late dining does not necessarily interfere with early rising," happily and as quietly observed he of the distinguished appearance; "all of the big-bugs get up at six o'clock in the morning."

The making of small talk between the pair, however, was not intended to be a continuous performance, for more to their purpose was the selection

38 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

and capture of a table that commanded the best and most comprehensive view of the room. The last speaker soon worked a bit of magic with one of the chief servitors, and the desired point of vantage was secured.

In taking possession, it appeared that the visiting party had suddenly grown to four—the extra two coming out of the background of the nearest vestibule, and apparently young men of fashion, though the heavier set one had just unfashionably muttered that he felt “trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey.” It is worth a wager that the complainant was Billy Barry, just as sure as his companion was Henri Trouville, and that the two leaders were the French agent, Ardelle, and the famous Horatio Adams from Scotland Yard.

Henri was the only one of the quartette that reflected any pleasurable excitement at the prospect of *de luxe* dining, and even he was hampered by the strong suspicion that somebody in the party was carrying handcuffs with unpleasant intent.

When Billy seized the opportunity for a whispered conference with his chum betwixt breaks in the bill of fare, what he had to say was “that he’d be blamed if he would speak the word which would send anybody to the Tower,” significantly adding: “My memory isn’t worth a cent in matters of this kind.”

He had to take it for granted that his flying

partner was in agreement, as the latter was all eyes for the entrancing exhibit of gems and gorgeous toilettes and all ears for the velvety notes of violins that filled the air.

The passing show was also holding the intense interest of Ardelle and Adams, but for no reasons of sentiment.

Left to his own devices, and tiring of such diversion as floating crumbs in a finger-bowl, the Bangor boy took to wondering if it would be any violation of the rules of etiquette if he indulged in a little leg-stretching tour in the wake of numerous promenaders that he had seen from time to time moving singly, doubly and in groups through an arched doorway draped with red velvet curtains and located at the north end of the restaurant.

With due caution, Billy, noting that his companions were in most attentive attitude, fell into the train of several couples immediately passing the back of his chair, and headed straight for the velvet curtains. If any of the other strollers stopped for chatting on the way, the young scout had no reason nor intent to do likewise. He was in for a walk-around, and just kept moving, brushing elbows with the elect as indifferent as you please.

Once out of the dining-room and on the other side of the red portières, Billy encountered a breath of freshened air and also a new show of fresco and

gilt in a long, narrow apartment lined on both sides by divans and easy-chairs.

The explorer could see by a glimpse of the further outlet that this fancy canyon of rest was the connecting link between the restaurant and the hotel rotunda. With batteries of eyes to right and left the boy sauntered along until the circular room beyond was but a step or two away. Then he stopped stock-still, staring as if a ghost had crossed his path. From one of the electric elevators, swiftly falling and noiselessly checked at this floor level, had emerged a slim shape, crowned with a shock of sandy hair that would defy a barber to plaster down.

Billy instantly recognized at near sight the pussy-footed, human question mark, whom he had met in Bremen and in the shadow service of Roque, Germany's greatest secret agent.

If the foxy individual with the bushy topknot returned the compliment of recognition, there was no sign of it in his polished manner or own-the-world air as he tendered his hand to a portly, white-whiskered gentleman posing in the entrance of the rotunda.

"Now if it were anybody else but that measly prowler," argued the Bangor boy with himself, "I'd feel like back-tracking and let it go at that, but being it's he, I am curious to know what's his play."

For a few minutes the trail was an open one, and Billy had no trouble in following the movements of the oily glider in and out of the various gatherings of hotel patrons discussing, of course, the war and war measures.

However, when there was a general drifting to the center of the room, caused by the arrival of some celebrity, the amateur detective missed his quarry, and though his search was thorough, including a peep into the bar, it proved of no avail. The sandy-topped man had apparently vanished, as in thin air.

Billy had been enjoying his impromptu sleuth venture much more than he had the chair-warming after dessert in the dining-room, but he was just forming a decision to rejoin his companions in the café when he saw a liveried attendant pushing the revolving storm-door to let somebody out. That somebody was under a tall hat and muffled in a fur-collared overcoat. Between hat and collar a sandy mane was in evidence!

In renewed excitement of pursuit, the young aviator gave the languid doorman a mild shock by working the door himself, and still further shaking up the code of swell departure by leaving bare-headed.

Outside the lad paused under an overhanging canopy of glass, peering at a pall of misty darkness. Shuttered windows, an enforced precaution, kept

42 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

inside all the illumination that belonged there, and barring a flash here and yon from the headlights of distantly parked automobiles and the dull, far-away glow of subdued street lamps, there was real cause for eye-strain.

Still a seeker for something to do, Billy left the shelter of the canopy and sidled along the building line. He heard the crisping of tires on the slippery pavement beyond the seemingly deserted sidewalk and the rasp of clutches. There was a gleam of light at the curb and the outline of a waiting car. The watcher, confident of concealment in the blur about and above him, essayed a step forward, getting a shiver from the chill dampness pervading the atmosphere—and then something else.

Over the face of the boy descended the stifling folds of a thick silk scarf, an attack from behind, the compress instantly tightened by a strenuous twist at the rear of the neck, accompanied by a sharp jerk backward. Billy was unable to utter a sound, but he made it up in active endeavor to get rid of the suffocating bandage. The drag, though, was all in favor of the scarf-holder until just at the door of the waiting machine, quivering with suppressed power for the getaway, the feet of the mysterious assailant took a slide on the wet asphalt and down he went with a hundred and fifty pounds of husky youth on top of him.

Momentarily relieved from the pressure of the

gag, Billy forced a roll-over, and succeeded in getting his head entirely out of the silk envelope. Even then the boy made no outcry, strange to relate, but, fighting mad, played havoc with the collar and shirt front of his antagonist, the clothes-tearing tactics met by the desperate attempts of the other fighter to obtain a wind-pipe grip.

Though the struggle in the fog was a silent one, save for labored breathing, it was hardly possible that the wrestling bout could long proceed without some outsider stumbling into it. Indeed, a hotel flunky was then at the door with first pipe of a whistle to summon some sleepy chauffeur from motor stand up the way. The man who had put the bonnet on Billy spoke aloud, the once only since the kidnaping venture began, and it was a quick command, not in English, to the driver of the nearby machine.

With a jump the fellow quit his seat behind the wheel and reached for the boy, who had wrenched himself free from fighting embrace and in backward retreat to the storm door. Now it was that Billy let out a yell like a Comanche. The "bobby" at the corner began pounding the pavement with his night stick, all uncertain whether the shrill alarm meant Zeppelin or plain murder. The first one out of the hotel was Adams of Scotland Yard, with Ardelle and Henri at his heels. They had been searching everywhere for the missing Billy.

44 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

The opposing force of two had in turn backed against the automobile at the curb, and it might have been that the slim one, in disordered garb and mashed silk hat under foot, intended to put up a bluff as a regular patron of the hotel—but he did not.

One of the stalwart policemen, coming upon the scene, turned an electric flash on the group around Billy, showing clear the clean-cut face of Ardelle.

The automobile shot away like a bolt before the crowd could realize what it was all about, and by the time Detective Adams began thundering directions to the police car to pursue, it was, in the condition of murky vapor, a needle-in-the-haystack contract that night to catch or identify the mysterious car.

While wires were warning metropolitan and city police districts for fifteen miles 'round Charing Cross, Billy Barry was under question fire in the hotel rotunda. The young aviator possessed something of the likeness you would imagine for a working athlete who had worn a dress suit throughout a football game. From one hand dangled a piece of watchchain and the grimy fingers of the other clutched a small packet of torn paper.

"Who put you under, Billy?" Henri was eager for a whack at the person who had made trouble for his chum.

"You know him, all right, pard," replied the undaunted hero of adventure, knuckle-rubbing a mud-splash on his chin. "The very same guy that spotted our friend here" (side-glancing at Ardelle), "in Bremen."

"What's that?" The French agent was instantly interested.

"The same, I said," continued Billy, "the sorrel-top who gave you more than once a run for your life. I never liked him a little bit. He tried to queer Henri and me with Roque, who was a first-rater when he wanted to be."

Ardelle passed some information to the hatchet-face from Scotland Yard.

"By the smoke of Newcastle," exclaimed the detective, "we have been full brothers of Balaam's pet. This fellow, I'm just told, is on the books of the house of Olaf Dolfin of Copenhagen. Olaf Fiddlesticks from Fiddlers' Green!"

"Who, then, were you looking for here to-night?" demanded Billy, by right of getting the worst of the deal.

"Olaf's cousin, I think," bantered Adams, tipping the wink to Ardelle. "But what's that you've got in your hand? Not the bit of chain; the paper, I mean."

"Blessed if I know," said Billy; "I forgot I had it."

46 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

The French agent and the Briton both reached at once for the frayed packet presented for inspection by the boy.

Ardelle had the first look.

CHAPTER VI.

A CIPHER THAT PUZZLED.

"GIVE me a glim at the reading," insisted the Scotland Yard man, curving his neck over Ardelle's shoulder, while the French agent was thumbing the tears and creases in the note sheets of tissue, which Billy had handed over.

"It's a record from Queer Street, 'pon my life," declared Adams, when he got his "glim" at the jumble of penciled words, numbers and pothooks. "I know an old bloke in Penton Square that's good at this sort of thing, and we'll have him at it in the morning, first show of day."

The two had drawn a little aside from the rest of the group during the hasty investigation of the papers coming so strangely into their possession.

"This cryptogram, if it can be unraveled," remarked Ardelle, finger-tapping the secret writing to emphasize his words, "may prove an illustration of the method which enabled Frankfort to give out British budget news before the London public knew anything about it."

"It might also be a tip to those Zeppelin pirates," maintained the renowned Horatio.

Just then the deliberations of the pair of silent service experts were interrupted by the giant policeman, who had done the pavement pounding when Billy yelled. Held to his station, this officer could not join in the chase after the bolting car, but extended his duty to the hotel interior, keeping one eye all the while on the young scrapper in damaged clothing.

"What charge, sir, against this lad?" questioned the heavy-footed cop addressing Detective Adams.

"Running loose without a guardian," was the facetious reply. "No charge at all, Baldrige," then advised the Scotland Yarder, in more serious tone, "it's all the other way. The fellow who escaped tried to steal him."

"Oh, well, sir," said the officer, "I didn't know," turning as he spoke in the direction of the door, not, however, without a show of suspicion in the glance he gave Billy before leaving.

When Billy had been put under cover of hat and overcoat and appearing once more respectable, the party of four quit the hotel for a cab ride to Ardelle's temporary quarters near Whitehall.

The cipher record was the all-absorbing topic of conversation on the way, and continuing under a shaded lamp in the rooms of the French agent.

But with all their shrewdness and previous ex-

perience, neither Ardelle nor Adams could apparently make head nor tail out of the pencil puzzle.

"If it were only shorthand," lamented Billy, "my pard here could read it like a book."

"And if it were a duck egg we could see inside by breaking it."

Mr. Adams was sarcastic only when he hit a problem that was entirely too much for him.

"In the home town of Sherlock we ought to find the key to this pretty quick," laughingly suggested Henri.

The Briton either failed to appreciate the humor of this sally, or he was too busy thinking to notice it, as he took to slow pacing up and down the room with his hands folded behind him.

Ardelle sat like a statue, also in deep reflection, but of the still kind, while the boys cast longing looks around for a soft place to snooze.

Indeed, they were both cat-napping in their chairs when Adams growled his restless discovery of dawn through an east window.

"Maybe they've got his nobs by this time." Billy wanted to say something to show that he was awake, and he thought anything about his late assailant would be interesting.

"I'll make you a present of Hyde Park if such a thing has happened," was the cheerful tender of Adams, who had regained, with thought of getting busy again, his usual balance.

50 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

Ardelle, too, came out of the sleepless night without even a yawn, and the same old smile was in his eyes when he carefully put the puzzle papers in a long pocketbook, and with equal caution stowed the prize away under cover of a deep pocket at the hip.

He led the way to the street, gaily humming the refrain of some old song, "Come, Philander, let's be marching," and attracting an admiring look from the comrade sleuth, who muttered a compliment to his own liking:

"You may beat him around a stump, but you can't make him cry."

On the way to Penton Square, Adams stopped the four-wheeler long enough to treat the party to a piping hot breakfast at the cosy eating house conducted by Dick Densley, a retired pugilist, and a good one in his day, who had the record of attempting to enlist for the war three times, and as many times turned down on account of age and a "game" leg.

The hieroglyphic artist recommended by Adams, after close and minute inspection of the cipher submitted, through largely magnifying spectacles, sagely stated that a code like this was plainly of modern invention and it would be a good deal like guess work to decipher it. He was willing to try, though, if given time.

Ardelle was inclined to be impatient over pros-

pective delay, and Adams continuing as a champion of the Penton Square authority, a compromise was reached by having a photographic copy made of the secret writing for the use of the slow mover.

"If I could locate Legarde this precious day," suddenly exclaimed the French agent, "there would be a chance of bouncing into a solution of this problem in short order. He cracked a hard nut like this at Calais within an hour."

"What's his business when he's working?" asked Adams.

"Aviator, daredevil, scholar, and gentleman," proclaimed Ardelle.

"Some job, living up to all that," commented the Briton, shaking his head.

"Seems to me that Demonet ought to know all about the flyers of France; he's just over and a boss instructor of aeroplaning. Why not ask him about the fellow you call Legarde?" Billy advanced the idea in hit or miss way.

"The very thing," declared Ardelle, nodding approbation, "and we'll go to corps headquarters double quick."

At sight of the boys, Lieutenant Morgan, casting aside all official reserve, gave them both a hearty hand-clasp. "Hope you are back to stay," he remarked, as though he meant every word of it.

The French agent, however, was getting some information in the aerodrome at the time of this

greeting which had much to do with the next assignment of the young aviators. Demonet had very promptly advised Ardelle that Legarde was operating just then with the coast air patrol between Dover and Dunkirk.

"That knocks out your plan of beating Penton Square on the cipher deal," asserted Detective Adams, "and, besides, you'd better wait until we try some of these picture copies on our diggers at the Yard. There is more than one string to a bow in London. Skylarking around after your man looks foolish to me."

"What's the odds, one way or the other? The word, whatever it is, did not go out; deadwood, it appears to me." Billy wanted to try something new.

"Just clear your noddle, sonny, of that kind of thought," abruptly admonished Adams. "This water is too deep for you."

"Now will you be good?" Henri gave his chum a poke in the ribs.

Ardelle merely smiled at this by-play. He was by no means out of the notion of seeking the services of Legarde as a successful prober of cryptograms, if there could possibly be invented a method of speedily catching up with the airman whose wits worked as easily as a hair-trigger.

It had been Billy's fortune to suggest the source of information which pointed the general where-

abouts of the man wanted, but now it was Henri coming to the front with a tip in the matter of rapid transit to the locality mentioned:

"It would be simply a matinee to fly that sixty-six miles to Dover, and with one of the kind of sea-planes under us that Captain Johnson sold here, a little stretch of water wouldn't keep us from going further if we wanted to."

Lieutenant Morgan glanced up from the desk at which he had been writing. Henri's eager presentation of the travel plan seemed to remind the officer of something. "It has just occurred to me," he said, rising from his chair, "that we've got the very make of machine you mention 'stabled' at the docks." The aviation officer had been a cavalryman before he took to the air.

"Hear that, Buddy?"

Billy heard, and was mightily interested, forgetting all about the cipher writing.

"The four of you will handsomely fit into the big plane," proceeded the lieutenant, "and——"

"Not me, by a long shot," interrupted Detective Adams. "There are more than six hundred railroad stations on London for me to pick from, and if there are none to suit, I'll walk. On top of all that," he concluded, "before you get back I'll be showing the spy message in plain English to the chiefs in Downing Street."

"Much luck to you, old man," was Ardelle's ready

54 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

response. "Now if the lieutenant will kindly put us in the way of starting we will be off the minute he does. You know the air route to Dover?" The speaker here directly addressed the Young Aeroplane Scouts.

"Know it! E. S. E. That's the chart, isn't it, Henri? Sure, we know it. Made the round trip once before, sir, thank you."

"Move along then," said the French agent, giving Billy a friendly push.

An hour later, off the brink of the Thames, the launching of the airship was accomplished, Henri at his old post in the engine cubby, Billy at the wheel, and Ardelle a comfortable passenger when the great hydroplane lifted for flight.

"I don't mind telling you now, young man," confided the French agent leaning to Billy's ear, and raising his voice above the noises attending the onrush of the mighty machine, "that Legarde is not the only man I have in mind at the end of this journey. The cipher wasn't all Greek to me!"

The wheelman did not risk a turn of the head, for the speed of the seaplane and the adverse winds it was then encountering required individual attention, but the young pilot tried to indicate by a shrug of the shoulders that he was not wholly surprised by what Ardelle had said. "I'm not altogether a dummy," the Bangor boy assured himself.

The seaplane now hovered over the Channel, and

Dover Castle, looming four hundred feet above the sea level, was in sight. When the airship splashed in its striking of the heaving waters below and serenely floated in a long swell of the tide at the docks, the anchoring place was but a hundred yards away from the very spot from which the Young Aeroplane Scouts had first air-sailed from the war zone, one wild night in the sometime ago.

As Ardelle rose from his seat in the aircraft, directly exposed to the stiff breeze coming down from the north, and the unbuttoned front of his long overcoat blowing open, the keen-eyed pilot noted that his sleuth companion wore a khaki uniform, cartridge belt, and other field equipment. And the boy was also soon impressed by the additional fact that the arrival of the French agent was expected by at least two men, and both at the moment working a motor-boat alongside of the seaplane.

"How fortunate this meeting," was the hail of Ardelle to the extremely blonde young man in the bow of the motor-boat. "Yet I did not think for a minute, Legarde, that you would fail me!"

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

"THESE secret service agents beat the dickens for winding in and out. Show me one that went straight to the point, and I'll show you a curiosity."

Billy had the chance to regale his chum with this choice observation of experience as the pair together made ascent to the Dover docks.

"You think it was all a bluff then, Ardelle pretending to be stumped over the puzzle writing, and, too, going to Demonet to find out about the very fellow who was Johnny-on-the-spot when we got here?"

"Not all, old top, not all," temporized Billy, "but it has been bumping in my thinking cap that our friend, the aviation instructor, is not an innocent bystander in this business. If you tell me that he and our passenger to-day held council merely at my suggestion, tell it first to the marines, my boy."

"Still I am not convinced," argued Henri, "that Ardelle could have had any advance idea of the turn that affairs took at the hotel, when you blundered into the sandy-top."

"Sure, he couldn't," admitted Billy, "and just who was the fish for which he and Adams were really angling in the restaurant is yet a mystery to me."

"Somebody, though, he thought we knew," said Henri, "or he wouldn't have taken us along."

"Maybe"—Billy hesitated in expressing the thought—"it was the whale of them all for whom the net was set and not of the like of the secret service minnow that I tackled."

"Go 'way man," bantered Henri, "you're thinking about Herr Roque. Clear your mind, Buddy, the old boss never nibbles at pinhooks. Show himself to Ardelle with everything against him? Don't you believe it."

"I'll stand solid on one proposition," persisted the young American, "and that is, the man we're talking about has some make-ups in which his own mother, if he has any, wouldn't know him from Adam."

The boys had perched themselves on a huge coil of rope for this talkfest, awaiting the return of the French agent and the blonde young man, who had gone into the town on a special errand. The other motor-boatman was sitting as a sentinel near the seaplane.

"Summing up," Billy next remarked, "it appears to me that this trip, to date, is just another link in the chain that is out for the smooth workers who have been smuggling information to an extent that

had raised a big kick. The getaway point, I'm betting, is somewhere around here."

"Great head," proclaimed Henri. "A getaway by submarine, perhaps."

"Geeminy!" exclaimed Billy. "Wheels within wheels. That's why, of course it is, Norcross came down here loaded with enough bomb material to blow Bangor to Halifax. Ardelle has the thread in his hands, and he's following it."

"He's following something besides a thread just now," announced Henri, extending an index finger toward the city side of the dock, from which direction Ardelle and Legarde were coming, immediately preceded by a stevedore wheeling a small truck piled high with cans and packages of varying bulk, including a substantial food hamper.

Billy bloomed like a rose at sight of the wicker-work basket. The air journey had made him as hungry as a goat, and the city clocks were striking six.

"No picnic at present with this," laughed Ardelle, laying a hand on the hamper, "and it's not dry land fare." The next words, however, had relieving effect: "There's a spread waiting for us all a little way up the street."

When the load on the truck had been speedily transferred to the seaplane, and the stevedore had replaced the motor-boatman as guard, the French

agent marshalled his companions to a cosy inn not far from the dockside.

After a second cup of coffee, Billy developed an inclination to find out whether Legarde had yet fully mastered the cipher writing, possessing the belief that the expert had already been juggling with the puzzle. He put the question to Ardelle.

"How about it, Louie?" The query was passed on by Ardelle, with a wink, to the expert in person.

Legarde exhibited two glistening rows of teeth. "Ask me the solution if we ever get back here." The evasive answer, spoken in French, admitted of more than one construction.

"'If we ever get back here,'" softly repeated Henri.

"Trouble ahead, I see," added the other chum. Billy had learned his French by hard knocks, and the significant sentence he well understood, both ways.

Conversation ceased for the time being, and until all were ready to leave the table. Ardelle broke the silence by calling aside the broad-shouldered youth who had been in company with Legarde when the seaplane arrived. During the low-voiced interview this last candidate for particular notice repeatedly twisted the points of a well-waxed moustache, and as often bowed and smiled.

"You travel with the top of the profession when riding with him," said Legarde to the boys, as the

60 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

trio awaited the conclusion of the conference. "Few equals of Paul Toureille as an aviator are now living."

"We have heard that you are some pumpkins as an airman yourself," declared Billy.

Legarde did not quite understand the comparison, but he realized the compliment, which he modestly dismissed with a gesture of dissent.

"With Paul I am not worthy of mention," he quietly asserted.

Drawing nigh was a test of quality for all of the aviators.

It developed that Ardelle's talk with Paul was one of instruction, and the evidence of this in the speedy departure of both of the airmen assigned to coast-line service.

As Toureille and Legarde left the inn and strode away into the gathering darkness outside, the boys set to wondering in regard to the mission of these aerial top-notchers, and why this early separation of forces.

"I thought the plan was that we were all going together on this excursion, for as sure as fate there is some sort of forward voyage booked or they would never have stocked up the seaplane with all that stuff a while ago." Henri had hoped to show that his chum and himself were not traveling out of their class in fast company.

Ardelle, however, was taking his ease at the fire-

side, and occasionally lunging with a long poker at the heart of the glowing coals. He acted like a man to whom the world had been very kind.

The boom of a big gun came dully to hearing from some distant point in the waste of waters beyond the cliffs. A lively game of cribbage between the landlord and one of his cronies came to sudden halt. The players dropped their cards and listened intently for another reverberation.

Where the far-away shot raised a live wire was at the fireplace—the poker hit the hearth with a clang, and Ardelle fairly leaped at the peg holding his overcoat, dragged the garment over his shoulders and made a bee-line for the door.

Billy and Henri grabbed for their caps and bounded after the lightning mover in front.

“The Zeps must be coming,” panted Billy, as he sprinted alongside of his partner, in the tracks of the speeding agent ahead.

“Not enough shooting for that,” puffed Henri; “that gun was ’way off shore.”

The wharf was alight with acetylene flares, and Ardelle in the center of a brilliant ring of them, when the boys jumped into the scene.

They expected instant order to climb into the sea-plane, which had not been docked. But instead of the aerial swan rocking in its water cradle, it was a high-power motor-boat in which they were to ride.

Squeezed between Ardelle and a coast-guard

62 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

shrouded in oilskin, in the middle of a wingless craft with which they had no identity, the Young Aeroplane Scouts were decidedly in the position of playing second fiddle.

There was enough excitement, however, in the night dash through the Channel chop to suppress grumbling, and certainly plenty of recoiling spray to cool any warmth of resentment.

The pilot steered as though he knew exactly where he was going, and never for a fleeting minute did the little searchlight in the bow flash otherwise than straight ahead.

When the motors finally ceased to vibrate the boat was drifting close to the armored sides of a warship that shadowed like a baby mountain out for a float.

The motor-boatman in the rear seat, as the little boat approached the big one, had been doing all sorts of swinging and bogging with a bull's-eye that showed as many colors as a switchlight in a railroad yard.

A more stealthy advance would very likely have provoked a reception that would not appeal to the average man.

Following a megaphone discussion, Ardelle had a foot on the "stairs" and then on deck. The boys assumed that they were also expected, and closed in behind the chief.

"Go aboard a warship, sir," whispered Billy to

his chum, imitating an invitation he had heard from busy boatmen one time in New Orleans, on occasion of a cruiser exhibit.

"You'll be going overboard one if you don't shut up," advised Henri under his breath.

The officer of the watch, now aware of the purpose of the visit and the authority behind it, told briefly of the mysterious passing of a small boat that would not or did not respond to hail, and how a warning round-shot seemingly won a halt from the little craft.

"But believe me, sir," declared the officer, "when the cutter went out to investigate there wasn't a soul in that bottom, little more than a skiff at best, and, by the powers, the searchlight showed a minute or so before, and plain, two men at the oars."

A second officer added his testimony, the same varying only in the vigorous and positive conclusion: "They couldn't have had time to drown, sir!"

Ardelle gave back nothing but thanks and a salute as he went over the ship's side and descended to the motor-boat, hooked to the chains of the war vessel.

With the cast-off, the pilot turned the hummer at a merry clip in the direction of the high-lights of Dover.

"Say, Mr. Ardelle," volunteered Billy, when the return trip was about half completed, "what do you think I saw on that cruiser?"

"About everything there was to see, I suppose," chuckled the French agent.

"No joking, sir, there was a platform aft with an aeroplane on it."

"Why not?" questioned Ardelle. "That was a mother ship, and they carry flying machines."

"But doesn't that interfere with gunfire?" put in Henri.

"Perhaps," admitted the chief, "but an aeroplane is often as good as a gun in a pinch."

"I bet you," heartily agreed Billy. "Now, once more, Mr. Ardelle, what do you think became of the men in the boat who 'didn't have time to drown'?"

Ardelle pretended to have a coughing spell, preceding this reply:

"When you can't swim, my lad, call a cab!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FIGHT WITH A SUBMARINE.

ARDELLE was not now contemplating a night flight in the seaplane, and for reasons best known to himself. There had been the slip of a cog somewhere in his plans, and something had happened beyond anticipation.

If the French agent had been out-generalled, the boys were true blue to the opinion that the slip was not directly under his own thumb, for though they were not very deep in the present game as yet, their faith in the acuteness of this shadow artist was hard to shake. Billy and Henri both could testify that a weasel was nowhere with Ardelle when the latter was working single-handed.

The young aviators, sharp blades themselves, had torn a hole or two in the veil behind which the secret maneuvers were in making. Not the least doubt in their minds but that the trail of contraband news-bearers to this coast was well marked, that the accidental discovery in the hotel had started one of the inside workers to running, that there had been some

revelation in the strangely acquired cryptogram which verified suspicion of an underwater route for communication or escape, and which suspicion had originally brought Ardelle to London. The boys, too, could safely assume that the three cables connecting Dover with France could not be tapped by the German emissaries, and equally sure that top-of-water craft headed for Belgian territory would not go far without some accounting.

Billy and Henri could easily accept the submarine theory in explanation of the mysterious disappearance of the two men from the boat sighted that night by the lookout of the British warship. One of their earlier experiences in the war zone was a toss into the North Sea, when the little steamer in which they were seeking to escape from battle horrors, went up in the air on top of a boiler explosion. Well they remembered, exhausted and drowning, the saving grace of the magically rising bridge of an English submarine.

What then caused the hitch in Ardelle's capture program was the only open question for later development.

Though it was apparently not intended that the boys were to be in instant demand for aviation service, the fact that the seaplane remained uncovered and had taken on a fresh supply of petrol and a store of provisions was sufficient assurance that the

next move would not be merely a retracing of the journey from London.

Additional evidence of some other intention was furnished by the sleeping arrangements—designed for short notice awakening, every one in their clothes and bunking on rolls of sailcloth in a nearby warehouse. Ardelle did not seem inclined to sleep at all.

He said to the boys just before they entered the warehouse that he hoped for clearing weather in the morning—the Channel mist at the time growing thick enough to cut with a knife.

“Everything would look alike in this sort of fog,” was Billy’s retiring remark.

Henri passed into slumber without a word, but in dreamland he was haunted by a menacing shape, the face and form of Roque, the dreaded secret agent of Germany.

The early morning satisfied the hope of the French agent. Steady winds from the south had swept away the mist, and it was as clear as a bell above.

Ardelle was talking to a lanky chap with a face full of whiskers, wearing a glazed cap and buttoned up in a pea-jacket, when the boys appeared on the dock, stretching the kinks out of their arms and taking long breaths of the invigorating air. The sailor was introduced to the young aviators as Cap-

tain Soule, with the information that his boat had come down from the north during the night.

"Saw one of them flying machines along about sun-up," advised the captain, when told that the boys were aviators. "They broke off from somewhere I don't know; only thing solid nearby was a warship, which made me hoist a flag in answer to signal."

"That biplane I saw on the ship," eagerly predicted Billy.

"You did not happen to notice any periscope sticking above the water?" asked Ardelle.

"You mean them things that the underwater sailors see with? Not a sign of a tube, sir. I always steer wide of those submarines. You never know what brand they are." With this statement the captain touched his cap to Ardelle and departed.

"What do you suppose we are hanging around here for? Supper and breakfast, and still nothing doing, though we slept like firemen on watch last night."

"Don't get impatient, Buddy," was Henri's soothing reply. "We'll move all right when they find which way the cat is going to jump."

"The first jump was over somebody's head, it appears to me," grumbled Billy.

Ardelle was taking advantage of the clear morning for which he had wished by frequent observations with field-glasses, turned skyward. The boys

had been previously directed to put the seaplane in sailing trim, and had thoroughly done that which they so well knew how to do. The staunch craft was fit as a fiddle for speed and distance when these experts boxed the tools.

"The boss is still trying for a degree in 'sky-ology'," announced Billy with a grin when Henri and himself regained the level of the dock, ready to report everything O. K.

It was about twenty minutes to the noon hour when the faithful vigil of the French agent was rewarded by sight of a dark line streaking the blue dome overhead, and curving by degrees downward. Nearer and nearer, lower and lower, through the glasses showing bird-like, then to unaided vision a full-rigged aeroplane of largest make.

Swooping to and wheeling above the wharf, its whirring plainly heard, the machine trailed a long streamer, of hue dark red, hovered close over the dock for a moment, and as the man holding the glasses lifted his cap, shot away in the direction from whence it came.

The wait at Dover was ended. Five minutes later the seaplane skimmed the waves, lifted, and bowled away to the north, with a spanking breeze behind it.

Such was the speed of the airship, double-engined and favored by the pushing wind, that it was fast overhauling the winged messenger which had led the way.

Ardelle also flung a dark red signal to the breeze as the seaplane passed over the warship which had been boarded by him in the past night. In answer, the colors fluttered to the fore.

Billy, at the wheel, scented the tang of the North Sea, as the airship he was guiding closed in on the lighter craft. In the matter of two or three seconds he scented something different than straight flying by the aeroplane in front. It was short-circling like a hawk over a chicken-yard. The observer at the rear, the young pilot could now see, had turned in his seat, and this movement followed by commotion in the water far below.

Looking down through an opening in the frame, Billy quickly noted the conning tower of a submarine showing out of the water.

"Missed her clean!" shouted the boy, referring to the aim of the bomb thrower in the aeroplane.

"The thing's aground! Drop nearer!" Ardelle gave the command in stentorian tone.

The forward aeroplane had been the first to descend to lower strata, in order, no doubt, to get better range for the next bomb, and before Billy could operate for downward movement, there was something doing on the stranded submarine. A lever was pulled, and a gun that was folded into the back of the underwater craft, swinging muzzle upward, opened quick-fire at the aeroplane.

One of the shots told, and of disaster to the

mechanical bird, for down it went all in a flutter, and then, in complete state of collapse, like a plummet into the waves, the aviators swinging out and hanging to the rigging.

Like a swallow the seaplane darted to the rescue, inclining like greased lightning to the surface of the deep, in one instant alongside of the stricken aeroplane, in the next soaring again with the added weight of the two aviators who had come to grief.

In the upward turn Ardelle fired thrice with a heavy service revolver at the submarine operator who had jumped from the turret to operate the gun-lever when the bomb had fallen. But the jerk of the seaplane made aim uncertain, and the pistol shots had no effect.

Out of reach of the submarine cannon, the occupants of the airship, with the exception of the pilot, busy in keeping the craft in a circle, were watching the frantic efforts below to extricate the underwater boat from the shoal in which it had stuck.

A voice which Billy recognized as that of Legarde was bewailing the fact that the bombs were all in the damaged aeroplane, which had all but disappeared under the water, upheld only in part by cork attachments.

The swivel-gun of the seaplane was put into play by the other rescued aviator, Paul—too late, however, to prevent the successful withdrawing of the

72 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

submarine from the shallows and its dive out of sight.

Billy was about to once more descend when loudly warned to desist by Legarde.

"They'd torpedo us to fragments if we hit the water-level now," was the cry of the veteran airman.

"But you'll lose that fine biplane if we waste any more time." The young pilot counted as a treasure any good specimen of aircraft.

"Better that than feed the fish," promptly responded Legarde.

"They'll have to hunt the bed-rock if they pass the line of destroyers a little further north," calmly assured Paul, "and they know better than to try going back the way they came."

"Folsom will get what is left of the aeroplane, don't you worry." Legarde wanted to convince Billy that there was no intention of deserting valuable property if it could possibly be saved. Folsom was in command of the motor-boat that was working in conjunction with the flyers in this pursuit.

"The best thing to do now," proposed Paul, "is to move on to Dunkirk and lie in wait there for the wily gentlemen who are no doubt plowing somewhere beneath us in that direction."

As "moving on" had been the course of the seaplane for the past ten minutes, there was nothing more in aid of the proposition submitted than to put

some extra pressure on the motors, which Henri immediately proceeded to apply.

"Old acquaintance, Buddy!" sang out the brisk worker in the band-box engine room at sight of the familiar coast line and French territory.

The Young Aeroplane Scouts in their time abroad had certainly mixed up a jumble of adventures in the vicinity of the old seaport town with a red-letter history. Here they had been delivered by submarine and taken away in a seaplane, and here, also, they had witnessed a sky battle without parallel in military annals.

Where now the high tower from which had floated the blue and white flag of the town on the memorable day? The more recent German bombardment had worked havoc, indeed, with much of everything above ground.

When the seaplane had settled in the near distance, Billy made inspection with a binocle of the burg's remains. "Shot up like a tin advertisement tacked to a tree," was the inspector's report to his chum at the rear. The boys had seen many perforations of the kind along country roads.

"The seventeen-inch shells that did this job," volunteered Legarde, "had a noise behind them that could be heard for forty miles. I was a listener myself."

"Seems to be quiet enough now," observed Henri.

"The population isn't as big as it used to be,"

stated Legarde, "and the few who have not gone visiting are not inclined to be boisterous."

"Well, we have a night of it here," broke in Ardelle.

"And perhaps a to-morrow," added Paul.

"Here comes a boat," announced Billy. "The mayor, I expect, with the keys of the town."

No such official, however, was in the welcoming crew, but each and all of the greeters apparently had acquaintance with Ardelle.

"Another secret service bunch," was Billy's quick conclusion.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ALARMING RESPONSE.

"You certainly had the wool pulled over your eyes, Littell, when you let that pretty pair pass you." Ardelle spoke with a touch of severe reproof to the man at the helm of the outcoming boat.

The speaker referred to the getting away from the English coast above Dover, in the night before, of the two foreign spies who had been so successfully operating in London.

"They must have had magic on their side, sir," declared the crestfallen individual in answer to the sharp reprimand. "Six of us were concealed at the cove, as directed by you, and if they went out there, the horned one helped them."

"It was done, nevertheless," grimly remarked the French chief agent, "and it's fifty chances to one now in favor of their getting home to laugh at us. Pull in," he finished, and the seaplane moved shoreward, pulled by towing line.

"Two of our submarines are on the lookout here, sir," further advised Littell, who was still hoping

76 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

against hope that a certain blunder on his part would be wiped out by a catch, after all.

"We've had two opportunities and failed," commented Ardelle. "Hardly likely that the third will come and perch on our shoulders."

"That was a bad throw I made with the bomb," sadly admitted Paul.

"Tut, tut, comrade," gently chided the chief, "I charge you with no fault, and, remember, that yourself and Legarde are the heroes of the occasion."

This compliment had the effect of putting in the silent class the modest airmen who had come within an ace of losing their lives a short time before.

"Well, it appears as if I'm the goat," said Littell to one of his fellow boatmen as they disembarked at the Dunkirk wharf.

Billy and Henri were immediately interested in observing the plain traces of bombardment all about them, and the prevailing methods of protection in the way of sandbag decorations, and many windows crisscrossed with heavy yellow paper to prevent the panes from falling into the rooms if they became cracked.

"Not so much scare as there was," the boys were informed by their guide, who happened to be Paul, "but still a bit uneasy, these people. I'll show you the cellar arrangements after a while."

At the hotel the party soon learned that the lower floors were yet in popular demand, and plenty of

room anywhere and everywhere. The proprietor was a young man with ruddy countenance, but, before his time, as gray on top as a badger. He was well posted in shelling, and full of advice as to conduct when under the spell of explosions.

Our Young Aeroplane Scouts intimated that they had smelled a little powder themselves, had been closer than this to the roar of the big guns, but were willing to acknowledge that they had no present desire to repeat the experience.

They had a firm friend in the landlord at the close of the conversation, and he was rather grieved that the young airmen persisted in going against his counsel by going upstairs to sleep.

"If anything should happen," he earnestly argued, "don't stop to put on your clothes; just throw on a blanket, and I'll see that you get to the cave."

"He can't be cured, I guess," said Billy, unlacing and kicking off his shoes. "I've been nervous several times myself, so I can't blame his nobs much."

"Ardelle and the rest of the bunch evidently expect to stay up the rest of the night and talk." Henri was convinced that his chum and himself were in sole possession of the next to the top story of the hotel. Not a footfall had they heard since coming up.

"The chief don't need any sleep; I do!" With this declaration Billy rolled into bed.

78 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

While both boys were naturally sound sleepers, their campaigning habits had created an instinct of easy waking in case of emergency.

The hotel building had so many times been shaken by concussion that it was full of creaks, and a very decided squeak of a footboard in their room later on, under some sort of pressure, caused the young aviators to jointly assume a bolt-upright attitude in bed.

"That you, Billy?"

"No; I thought it was you, pard."

Henri had a foot on the floor and was reaching for a match in the pocket of his coat, hanging over the back of a chair.

"Candles go with the craze here," mumbled the boy, touching the tallow with the tinily flaring match.

Holding the dip aloft, Henri made a survey of the apartment, but in the shadowy surroundings there was no palpable movement except the flickering rays cast by the candle. The door, however, was slightly ajar, and Henri was certain that he had closed it tightly before retiring.

"Maybe his landlordship came up to lead us to the cave," sleepily suggested Billy. "Come to bed, Buddy; it's nothing but a give somewhere in this old rattletrap."

"One or two more 'gives' like that would call me downstairs, anyway, so I think I'll just take a peep

outside for luck." With the words, Henri tiptoed to the door, the candle in advance.

In the long hall between the stairways, one ascending and the other descending, it was as silent as the grave. Henri went first in the direction of the downgoing flight, with mincing step, as he was barefooted and had no desire to tramp heavily on splinter or tack. Venturing no further than the top of the stairs, and feeling a bit foolish in regard to this night prowling for no tangible reason, the lad turned back, determined to climb in bed and stay there. As he faced about, a current of air sweeping through the hall blew out the candle-flame, and it became suddenly as dark as pitch.

Feeling his way along the wall, Henri continued his return trip, the draught that had extinguished the light chilling his bare legs.

So startled was he by what next happened that the chill jumped from his legs to his heart, and he had open mouth for a yell. The hand extended for guidance along the wall had been seized in a cold grip by firmly closing fingers.

A quick whisper saved nervous outcry and lively resistance. "Buddy, it's me," reduced the tension.

"Well, what in the dickens," gasped Henri, "made you grab me like that?"

"Ssh!"

Billy had some incentive to avoid disturbance. The same caution ruled in his stealthy tread and

evidenced by a couple of blisters on his thumb and forefinger, raised when he pinched off the lighted end of the candle he was carrying at the time of a certain discovery.

The boys backed against the wall, heads together, that they might converse with least effort and sound.

"Ardelle's in the room just beyond ours!" Henri's first thought at this information was that here was light on the unseen visitor to their apartment. But why was Billy going through all this hush act if that was all?

The latter youth had stopped whispering with the evident purpose of listening, indicating as much by a significant pinch of his chum's elbow.

Nothing of result, Billy breathed some more of his own adventures into the ear of his companion.

"When I saw your candle bobbing down this way I went the other. I felt that both of us were chumps for our performance, and was going to give you the ha-ha in about a minute more, when——" Billy paused again to listen.

"What's the matter with going back to bed? We can talk better there." Henri was having difficulty in suppressing a strong desire to sneeze.

"Not yet," objected Billy. "Ardelle is laying for somebody. He told me to slink down here and flag you, and on no account to come back until there was a racket or until he whistled."

"Wish I had my clothes or a blanket," lamented Henri, with a shiver.

"Not so loud," cautioned Billy.

"What's the matter with you? Nobody could hear a whisper at this distance."

"We don't know who's around, or how close," insisted the Bangor boy. "You'll be astonished to learn that the submarine that we chased is beached just below the town and the whole gang that was inside are loose and right among us."

"Geeminy, and is that so?" Henri was warmer by excitement.

"Sure as you're alive," maintained Billy. "The bomb didn't make a hit, but it jarred the craft so it quit working right, and the stop was a clear case of have to."

"You found out a good deal in mighty quick time, it seems to me."

"Ardelle gave me the tip in about two minutes. The trimmings are mine."

"I see it now; the fellow that squeaked us awake got into the wrong room."

"He missed a hot reception by doing it." Billy choked a laugh.

"Say, Buddy, quit blowing in my ear," complained Henri.

A tremulous bird-call thrilled from the further end of the hall.

"The signal!" Billy reached for the near hand

of his chum and high-footed it, stage fashion, up the passage.

Reaching the door of the room they had occupied, or rather guessing that it was the same one by being open, the boys were halted by a low-spoken word, and at the same time given a push inside. A match and then a candle gleamed, revealing Ardelle, who deposited a revolver on the bureau top, then seated himself in one of the two chairs near the bed.

"Quite a celebration, this first night in Dunkirk," he joked, but in even tone, without raising his voice in the least degree. "Quite a reunion, I should say. My good friend, the enemy, is proving quite spunky all of a sudden. With the city of Lille, only forty miles away, in the hands of the Germans, he probably thinks to give me a nip for fair measure and get away with it."

"That submarine wasn't stalled on purpose, was it?" Billy wanted to know if the details he had constructed for Henri were in any way defective.

"Not if my inspectors were right in reporting on the condition of its machinery. Littell says if the operators had not run the boat aground the lot of them would be in Davy Jones's locker now."

"When did it happen?" Henri had grown resentful because of missing a report like that.

"About two hours after you fellows turned in the discovery was made. How early in the night the beaching actually took place I am not prepared

to state." The French agent appeared to be so composed and at ease that the boys could not figure out just where the trouble had shifted.

They had been doubling up the time of discussion by getting into their clothes. Any idea of another attempt at sleeping was remote. Three hours of it must suffice.

"Where are the others?" Another query from Billy.

"I fancy that Legarde and Toureille are at the front door, Littell and Pingree at the rear entrance, and the rest lurking around outside. Come here and let me show you something." Ardelle picked up the candlestick, opened the door, and walked out, not, however, before he recovered the revolver from the bureau and transferred it to a handy pocket in his coat.

In the next room, some twenty feet removed, and where Billy had stepped in to unexpectedly find Ardelle, the bed was occupied, on top spread, by a robust shape scientifically bound, hand and foot, and as neatly gagged. This tied person had a fierce look for the entering trio, and the look from cold gray fighting eyes.

"The gentleman who left his card at the wrong door," pleasantly observed Ardelle. "We are in hopes that his friends will not neglect him."

A snort of defiance from the bed.

"As I was saying," continued the French agent,

in the same easy manner, "how gladly would we receive any anxious inquiries as to this missing one."

This ironical expression of tendered welcome had an alarming and remarkable response. There was a noise overhead like the tearing of muslin, a shower of plastering particles from the seamed and scarred ceiling, which sagged in the center all at once—gave way—and down in the crash of splintered lathing and mortar slabs came a spread of arms and legs and a weighty form landing square upon the head and shoulders of Ardelle.

Following the avalanche, everybody and everything in the room, including the candle, were lost in dust and scattered debris.

Then another heavyweight dropped through the jagged opening in the ceiling, this time a reckless jumper.

CHAPTER X.

ACTORS IN VIVID DRAMA.

THE last comer from above was the only one ready for action in the first instant after the precipitation, he having the advantage of being on top, but he could not see where or who to strike with the butt of the revolver clinched by the muzzle in his right hand.

Billy, bending to avoid a bang on the head when the ceiling began to break, completed the safety dodge by falling face downward, while Henri, scraped on the forehead by the heel of the leading dropper's shoe, tumbled backward against the bed. In this position it was his luck to have another heavy brogan impressed on the tender joint of the ankle by the big rusher still on foot and blindly determined to liberate the captive stretched on the mattress.

In the meantime Ardelle had half risen from the dust and plaster heap in which, with his immediate antagonist, he was partly buried. Half rising was the limit then for the French agent, for the other

half was anchored by the waist encircling folds of a pair of stout arms. The enemy had the backhold, and was also the human cushion on which Ardelle was sitting. ,

Henri was just about convinced that the bound man on the bed had had his lashings severed, and then wholly so by the fact that two pairs of feet tramped on his lungs in the owners' hurry to mix in the fray with Ardelle.

The lad gave no more time to wondering why the French agent's reinforcements were so behindhand in coming to the rescue, or why they had not before been summoned by their chief—he just gave vent to a war-whoop, piercing enough to awaken a mummy.

This seemed, in the initial instance, to add an even more desperate phase to the struggle on the floor, a combat that sounded like several wildcats were concerned in it, supplemented by a pistol flash and shot. But the shrill yell had served its original design before the revolver explosion shattered the still watches of the night—the hall was now a race-track for a half-dozen agile runners, and light from as many waving candles showed the way.

No less lively, though, in preparing to bolt, were the men attacking Ardelle. The boys, each with a chair swung overhead, had charged into the *mêlée* as the powder-blaze marked the location of the stir, but in the dark could not safely strike for fear of

harming their friend. The young aviators heard the advance of the rescue party at the same time they did the impact of the blow that sent Ardelle again to the floor and out of the fight. Now occurred the speedy exodus of the assailants, turning the way of ascent to the uppermost regions of the hotel.

This getaway venture attracted a volley from the revolvers of the charging party, and the hall was filled by a haze of powder smoke. Legarde and Paul were the first to enter the room into which trouble had tumbled all in a lump. Hastening to the side of their fallen chief the anxious pair lifted and carried the unconscious agent to the bed, where reviving measures were applied with true soldier knowledge. Henri made a run to the room in which Billy and himself had been rudely roused and came back on the jump with the pitcher of water he knew to be there.

Between them all, the bringing to of Ardelle was accomplished, and the first questioning words of the chief, peering about from under the blood-stained bandage that cooled his fevered brow, were:

"Did you get here in time?"

"For this much, we did, thank heaven," fervently declared Legarde.

"I mean," querulously insisted the unwilling patient, "were you here in time to trap that red-handed crew?"

"Take it easy, chief," gently urged Legarde, "hardly a doubt but that Littell and his men have the rascals against the wall ere this."

"No doubt at all is what I want." Ardelle, with exhibit of restored strength and energy, shook off restraint and was on his feet before the others could say a word. Though swaying from momentary dizziness, the indomitable spirit prevailed, and the French agent strode through the litter on the floor with never a stumble, and as erect as ever. At the door he turned with peremptory demand:

"Which way did they run?"

"Not our way, I assure you, sir," promptly stated Paul.

"Don't quibble, man," was the impatient retort.

"No use trying to hold him back," was Legarde's side advice to his flying partner. "That way, sir" (addressing the chief and pointing upward).

The impatient leader, without further ado, hurried up the hall and with continuing celerity climbed the ascending flight of stairs. Wounds nor bruises had no lasting effect on the iron man from Calais.

In spite of the belief now of his veteran followers that the submarine crowd had escaped, owing to the fact that there had been no triumphal return of Littell and the balance of the pursuers, neither Legarde nor Toureille ventured a word as they trod at the heels of the chief.

Billy and Henri had not wholly recovered their

wits since the recent confusing events, and consequently were also content to bring up the rear in silence.

On the next floor, and directly under the roof, the windows in the various rooms were not closed by planking, and shutters here and there had sprung from their hinges. Through these openings gray streaks of dawn were stealing in, and in larger invasion through a broken skylight over the stair-landing. No longer use for candles.

"Something like a rumpus here," called Henri, who had gone out of the line of procession for a little personal look around. The signs of struggle were near a window cleared of both frame and glass, and opening several feet above the overhanging leaded cornice of an adjoining building. On the window-sill were a number of crimson splotches, completing a red trail extending several feet back on the floor. A leather cap, flattened like a pancake, lay close to a torn cuff, and a knife sheath was companion-piece to a crumpled neckerchief.

But of the participants in the mix-up there was no other trace, though the searchers ranged from front to back, and inspected every apartment. They found the room, however, with the large hole in the shaky floor and the cracked ceiling underneath.

"The entrance used by two of our late visitors," dryly jested Ardelle. "I fancy that at least one of

them was more or less astonished when his peeping venture had its collapse."

This hunt for friend and foe took much less time in actual process than in the telling about it. Scarce three minutes elapsed before the chief and his companions decided that Henri had located the exact point where general exit was made, and the pursuers were hot on the roof trail, marked again and again by the telltale carmine spots.

Ardelle, in advance, leaped from the window, down upon the next level, easily clearing the narrow intervening space between the two buildings, and without checking pace led his companions in quick-step half-way across the roof before he paused to scrutinize a new sign of previous passage.

"There was a drag here of something or somebody," he said, demonstrating the belief by pointing to a two-foot sweep for several yards in the dust and dirt-coated surface of the tin-sheeting. "And here's where they stopped," he abruptly concluded, after a step or two forward, looking into an open hatch in the roof, the cover of which had been cast aside, and at some little distance.

The French agent speedily had a leg through the aperture, and body, shoulders and head disappeared thereafter in the time-trifle of a few seconds. Legarde, Paul, Billy, and Henri followed, in order.

Once off the ladder, the five found themselves in a combination garret and storeroom for stacks upon

stacks of small bundles of paper, tape-tied and evenly piled from floor to ceiling.

"Looks like the record discard of our city engineer's office," observed Billy to his chum.

The three veterans of the party, however, were not concerned as to what use the dingy quarters had been put. They had located the stairs by which they could further descend, and were using them.

The next floor below was akin to the one above in the matter of musty odor and cobwebs, but instead of paper stacks the storage here was chiefly office furniture of counters, tables, chairs, and dividing lines of wood and glass partitions. The windows were high and iron-barred.

"It's the old Traders' Banking House," advised Paul, who knew something of Dunkirk before the war, when it was a famous market for butter and eggs.

On the ground level at last, the eager pursuers had for their viewing the same blank walls and dismantled office equipment that they had encountered above, the only variance being a rusty iron safe in the far corner.

Ardelle leaned heavily against the counting-house railing, deathly pale and faint from strain and overexertion so soon after the terrific blow that had laid open his scalp.

"For our pains a fig," he murmured, with a feeble gesture, as if to ward away the unusual

weakness by which he had finally been overcome.

The diversion was timely that lifted the French agent from his attitude of despondency. It was furnished by the sudden inswinging of the street door, and the appearance of Littell, with his right arm in a sling; Pingree, first in the rear, exhibiting a decided limp, and the third one, Wessells, with a red slash across the cheek.

"Three of a kind," was the greeting of the chief, essaying a ghost of a smile.

"Clean beat, too," woefully announced the reporting agent, seeking rest on a high-stool at the counter. "Thought we had them, but at the last minute outside help spirited them out of our grasp."

"More 'magic,' I presume," insinuated Ardelle.

"Just the same, I guess, sir—slick arrangement beforehand. I'd like to say, sir, that one of that gang, at least, is a bit heavier for the lead he's got in him."

"He is the man that marked the track with his blood, I suppose?" Legarde was the speaker.

"I lost a little myself," admitted Littell, "but far from the most of it." Then he proceeded to explain how it all happened, the fighting at close quarters and at longer range; how the men they pursued, four in number, seemed to have retreated the same way they came, and knowing the route, had reached the street several minutes ahead of their pursuers. "When we got to the door," concluded

Littell, "neither hide nor hair of them could be seen, and enough of the night then left to cover their flight. That's the story, sir." This accompanied by a glance at the chief to see how he was taking it.

Ardelle made no further comment, but wearily walked to the door, into the street, and to the nearby entrance of the hotel. In his wake plodded the other thoroughly tired, wounded and generally bruised actors in the vivid drama of the night.

Secret service was now public service by knowledge of about everybody left in town. The landlord had not been so excited since the last bombardment. At one time in the night, half dreaming, he credited the racket upstairs as a fair imitation of a shell dropping in.

The boys forgot the world and everything in it as soon as they felt chairs under them, and like logs they slept away the breakfast hour and all the succeeding hours till noon.

Their friend, the landlord, wanted to awaken and put the young aviators to bed, but Ardelle would not permit them to be disturbed.

"To their years even an oak-plank is a soft spot," he smilingly said.

While the boys were at table, making a clean sweep of everything edible in sight, the chief came up for a confidential chat, his close-drawn chair emphasizing the intent.

Leaning to the table, between the flying partners,

Ardelle produced from an inside pocket a thin silver card-case, and while unfolding it in his hand he spoke in tones audible only to the three.

"When you have assisted Legarde and Paul to complete repairs to their damaged aeroplane, you are expected to rejoin the command of Lieutenant Morgan, returning the airship in which we traveled to the Albert dock, and"—speaking still more softly—"with my regards, you are to place this little trinket in the hands of Detective Adams; in no other hands, mind you, than his."

"But are you not going back with us?" The question almost merged into one voice, though the two were asking it.

"No." Ardelle impressed the negative by shaking his head. "Our paths for a time here diverge. I am trusting you to serve me once more for the present by making delivery of this case and inclosure to our Scotland Yard friend. I confess I would like to see his sharp eyes glisten when he notes what it is. My visitors last night made a hard try to find it on me—but they did not, you notice."

"Which of you will be the actual bearer—eny, meeny, miny, mo—shall we settle it that way?"

"Settle it quicker than that," said Henri. "Let Buddy have it."

Billy accepted the trust, and over it buttoned the flap of his right hip pocket.

CHAPTER XI.

IN A BOMB-PROOF CAVE.

"I MIGHT say to you," confided Ardelle, when Billy had safely pocketed the silver case, "that if you were to be held up on the way by somebody on the opposite side of the game, it would put you in a sorry fix, this little box that you are carrying."

"That 'somebody' would have to climb pretty high," laughed the Bangor boy, "considering that Buddy and I are to sail back in the seaplane."

"Not at all likely, my boy, that you are going to be caught napping. I just desired you to know how much confidence I repose in my messengers." The chief divided a hand-slap between the shoulders of the young aviators.

"And with just a warning hint thrown in," shrewdly added Billy.

Ardelle nodded. "You've guessed it," he said. "Well, my lads, run along and help your brother flyers patch up their winged boat. I'll give you the fond farewell before we part, also the starting word."

Folsom, he of motor-boat fame, true to the prediction of Legarde, had succeeded in getting the crippled biplane out of the water, and by the use of floaters towed it in better shape than was expected to Dunkirk wharf.

Paul explained that an explosion close to an aeroplane is often sufficient, through the force of the concussion alone, to bring it down. "That is probably what happened to us," he remarked to Legarde, which remark reminded Billy that the same truth had once been nearly applied to the machine Henri was driving over Belfort gap.

With four working who knew just how, the slightly damaged rigging of the aircraft was soon put in shape, the motor machinery oiled and polished, and with a fresh charge of petrol the "bird" was ready to fly at a moment's notice. The boys then gave the big seaplane a look-over, which completed their assignment. The next, they knew, was an up-in-the-air one.

In the waiting time, Littell and Folsom, who had served as spectators at the airship tinkering, told of some of the newest kinks the British were utilizing in extracting the stings of the German undersea wasps. Of course, this pair, loyal to their own operating branch, proclaimed that the king of English outdoor sports just then was "chasing" submarines. "The 'chaser' cuts the large figure in water scrapping, let me tell you," challenged Fol-

som, with his weather eye seeking argument on the first point with some one, any one or all of the aviators in the company then resting comfortably on the wharf.

"What's a 'chaser,' anyhow?" Henri had a pretty good idea what the title meant, but he wanted to give the jovial boatman the satisfaction of answering in his own way.

"It's a dandy little teaser, in the first place," declared Folsom, warming to his subject. "A forty-mile-an-hour motor-boat, young man, sixty feet, end to end, ten foot beam, packing one crackerjack rapid-fire gun; she's light as a bubble, floats on the water with scarcely a dent in the surface, and any torpedo a submarine might fire is a joke. She moves faster than a torpedo."

"The 'subs' can't hide, either," put in Littell. "Even when they are working down sixty feet, and that's some depth, the 'surface wave' gives them away, and, too, the air bubbles and the little globes of oil. All the 'chaser' has to do is to keep over that wave. The sub. must come up some time, and then good-bye sub. Nothing but a fog or a storm can save her."

"The 'chasers' of late have been getting some heavy 'bags' of game," complacently observed Folsom, "some dozen subs in one week is the report."

"You'll have to concede, comrade, that some of the same kind of glory is coming to the aviation

corps." Paul managed to get this much edgewise into the talking match.

"Indeed, there is a good bit of credit coming your way, sir. And ain't we working together, just like one family? You've got a double chance, too; what you don't blow up on the level you blow down to it."

When Folsom had made this cheerful amend, Legarde, with a broad grin, turned a period by saying: "'Blowing' is evidently all the style, brother."

The boatman was still pondering over this version when it occurred to the airmen that if they were booked to leave that afternoon, it was surely time to be starting.

Legarde consulted his watch several times within the ensuing twenty minutes, and the boys began to feel the contagion of growing impatience.

An aged man, gray, grizzled and stooped, in garb typical of the Belgian peasant, had clumped across the wharf, and with humble and dejected mien halted to make his best bow to the group, one and all now silent and gazing seaward.

"Bon jour, messieurs," (Good day, sirs,) mumbled the grayhead.

Paul returned the salutation in his kindly way, and the others as politely.

The venerable visitant stood with lowered eyes, smoothing one gnarled hand with the other.

Then he stood erect and faced the company with

that smile which none there failed to instantly recognize.

"Gee, what a make-up!" exclaimed Billy.

Ardelle shook a finger at the boy. "You flatter me, sir," he playfully asserted.

"This means a journey for you alone, chief, doesn't it?" The query was Legarde's.

"I have a call to return, good friend," said the disguised agent. "Even in these perilous times we must not neglect our manners."

"He'd have his humor with one leg in the grave," muttered Littell.

"What's the word, chief?" Paul had an expectant look.

"One more night here for you all," replied Ardelle. "Better the belief that there is no break in this party until I am well on the road to Lille. You, Legarde, are about of my build, with shoulder breadth to match, and in the satchel back of the clerk's desk at the hotel are the garments in which I have appeared since our arrival here. Along about dusk, make it a point to walk up the street, north from the hotel, accompanied by the two lads. As the character you will assume is probably known by interested parties to have been roughly used last night, the addition of a bandage and a muffler will aid in the deception. I am supposed to be even now nursing my wounds in a room at the hotel.

All the employees there are too well posted to be led astray by quizzers, no matter how adroit."

All the while the chief was giving these directions in detail he kept up a mummerly of motion for the benefit of any possible watcher, shaking his head, pointing this way or that, and finally accepting, with many a bow and scrape, a tobacco pouch tendered by Folsom, who was thoroughly enjoying the performance.

"As you are leaving, gentlemen, at the early hour of seven on the morrow, and I have a long road before me, it is now farewell." With shambling gait the pretending peasant moved slowly away, and his last words were to Billy: "Make good with that delivery, my lad."

Noting the departure of the chief, with an air of depression, Legarde turned to Paul and sadly remarked: "Some day, I fear, his secret journeys will end in the longest one that a man ever takes."

Pingree, having elected to stand first guard over the aircraft and motor-boats, saw the others start towards the town and the hotel.

The afternoon still far from waning, Henri reminded Paul of that personally conducted underground excursion, which the latter had promised on the day of landing.

Legarde, when he heard the suggestion, immediately impressed a reminder of his own, that the

boys were to report in time to assist him in his directed impersonation of the chief.

"We'll be on the job," positively stated Billy. "If we don't show up it will be on account of a broken leg."

"Or a broken head, mayhap," was Folsom's contribution. He could not see how anybody could be interested in bomb-proof cellars when there was so much more to tell about "chasers."

"Might as well start in right now," said Paul, pointing to a house near the canal, in appearance quite a century old. "I am somewhat acquainted with the long-time resident here, and he will show us how they live when bombardments are in full blast."

The sight-seekers had cordial greeting from a white-haired citizen, to the manner born, who instantly demonstrated much pleasure at seeing Paul. The host was as immediately willing to exhibit the cave below the level—salon, dining-room and bomb-proof chamber, all in one, at the foot of slippery stone stairs. Owing to the nearness of the canal, the walls were necessarily scummy with mold.

"Not beautiful, but safe," remarked the host, with a characteristic shrug of his shoulders. "We have had some trying times, I assure you."

"Why don't you quit the town like some of the rest?" Billy saw no inducement about the premises strong enough to hold him, at any rate.

"Que voulez vous?" (What do you wish?) "It is all in a lifetime, and what's the use of flying from fate? Besides, this house has been my home for thirty years." All-sufficient reason to the old man to hold his ground.

"Ah, but have you felt both the terror and the thrill of the shell?" he exclaimed, nervously twisting a button on the front of his blue frock coat. "It has five strides, seeming so to the ear—when it leaves the cannon, when the house is hit, the explosion, the fall of the building, and then the fearful echo of it."

Each and all of the listeners could plead guilty to having felt that terror and thrill, but none of them had ever thought to figure out the experience in the manner of the speaker.

"Having seen a sample of the 'caves' which serve for safety when the great guns roar, is it your wish to delve further underground?" Paul's interrogation produced a "no."

"Bon soir, mon ami," (Good evening, my friend.) "And happy days once more." The aviator-guide, in leavetaking ceremony, had warmly grasped both hands of the aged host. Billy and Henri lifted their caps as to one of high degree.

Passing out into the open where the wind carried fresh flavor, and of the sea, where the setting sun tinted a long trail in the far stretch of water—what a contrast with that dark and damp interior behind,

above and below, with its musty odor, its sure cobwebs and its probable rats.

"It's me for the road where the going is good," hummed Billy, indulging in a minuet step.

"That sounds like a hobo or a highwayman," laughed Henri.

"If the way be high and dry let it go at that," gaily replied the Bangor boy.

By this time they had reached the hotel, and the lads were booked for another walk.

"Mr. Ardelle is still confined to his room," advised the landlord, with near approach to a wink.

"I think a stroll this fine evening would do him good," remarked Paul. "I'll go in and suggest the venture to him."

It was not long before "Ardelle" appeared in the dimly lighted waiting room, an interesting invalid in the chief's clothes, bandaged and muffled in true hospital style.

"Count us in for company, chief," was Billy's address, and the boys required no special invitation to join in the exercise prescribed for the ailing friend.

Those gathered in and about the hotel were not apparently disturbed by the matter-of-fact proceeding, but within a building not far removed there was much more interest manifested in the three pedestrians. Through darkened windows across the

street keen eyes marked every movement of the imitation Ardelle and his young attendants.

Legarde intimated to his companions, with a chuckle, that he suspected a look-out somewhere along the route, adding: "And so knew the fox who framed this comedy."

Bumping against the man in the middle, the each-side partners had silent assurance that in case of ambush there would be no lack of shooting-irons.

Further, it was a safe prediction that Paul, Littell and Folsom would be hanging onto the edge of **any** happening out of the ordinary.

CHAPTER XII.

A PLOT THAT FAILED.

THE stroll of deception extended for nearly half a mile, and the lapping of the waves on the sands of the shore could be distinctly heard, indicating a curve of the thoroughfare away from the heart of the town, and less and less of house occupancy. Under a street lamp Legarde paused to roll and light a cigarette before turning back, but immediately dropped the paper roll and stood at attention. A slouching figure was approaching the trio, head down, and with every step accompanied by the click of a cane-point on the pavement.

Legarde by a backward movement withdrew from the short spread of illumination, leaving the boys almost directly in the path of the man with the cane, he passing so close that Henri felt the brush of a shoulder, and, too, convinced by the one lightning glance over his head at the tall aviator that the cane was really not the guiding rod of one dim of sight.

As the click grew fainter, and the slouching figure

faded in the shadows of the deserted end of the avenue, Legarde lifted his hands from the bulging pockets of his greatcoat and inserted them within the arms of his companions. "March on," he said, and seemingly much amused about something.

Nearing the hotel, his laughing mood was even more in evidence, and as the living copy of a sorely battered comrade he then neglected his part. Not for long, however, for he entered the building the same afflicted personage as when he left it an hour previously.

A little later, in side-room conference, plans for the morning departure were made, after which Paul relieved Pingree as sentinel at the wharf. It was of great consequence that no vigilance be spared to protect from lurking foe both the air and water craft which were to carry the party away from Dunkirk and to other missions of special import.

Billy and Henri volunteered to take the watch from one o'clock until dawn, and decided that they would seek advance nap in chairs before the fire. The night clerk had solemn instructions from the young aviators to shake them at the single stroke of the clock, and he was faithful to the trust, even forceful, in the opinion of the suddenly awakened sleepers.

When the boys fared forth into the dark and misty night, the initial step beyond the door of the fire-lit room furnished a shiver that touched their

very bones. At the wharf they found Paul walking his beat with all the precision of a new policeman on trial, first sighting him on the forward move and with a tiny spark shining just below the visor of his cap. The inevitable cigarette was behind the spark.

For storage quarters, the Ardelle company had preempted space some little distance from the main shipping section, and when Paul sauntered away for his turn of rest, the new guards had only themselves for near company. The late sentinel left something beside an adieu—the handy pair of “barkers” he had been carrying in the outside pockets of his ulster.

“These ‘irons’ don’t gibe with my waist measure,” remarked Billy, as he laid a forty-four on the stern seat of a high-and-dry skiff drawn in for caulking. Henri disposed of the revolver entrusted to him by hooking the trigger-guard over a rusty nail protruding from a mooring-post.

“Now we can walk and talk in peace,” he said, as the pair started on the brief round in close vicinity of the craft they were supposed to defend in case of threatened damage.

“This skirmishing business has been a whole lot of a puzzle to me,” was Billy’s opening comment. “In a town like this I don’t see why we have to do all the work ourselves. It’s a local job to protect distinguished visitors.”

"I've a picture of Ardelle telling his troubles to the mayor," laughed Henri, catching up with his chum's jest. "But, really," he continued, "I can't exactly tell why Legarde let that cane-rapper get by. He knew for a certainty that it was one of the gang operating against Ardelle."

"Think again, Buddy," suggested the Bangor boy. "It was a small fish baited to tell a hidden big one just what the angler wanted the whale to believe."

"Right you are, Billy, yet that capture might have led to a round-up of the whole bunch."

"You are getting slightly over your head, old top. As I have said before, you and I ought to know by this time that secret service ways are not easy to figure out. But, pal," yawned Billy, "even these slick ones get a jolt once-in-a-while."

"When the ceiling falls in, for instance," suggested Henri.

Here the conversation lapsed. Out in the Channel a big vessel was passing, chugging and churning, and showing a long line of sidelights.

With attention diverted to the water front, the boys were unconscious of a stealthy movement behind them, and without warning Henri felt the encircling fold of a strong arm around his neck and the disagreeable pressure of a rough hand over his mouth.

Fortunately, it so happened that Billy in that same instant turned his head with intent of saying

something to his chum. What he saw in a flash, revealed by the glow of a reflector planted on the upper dock, caused him to swing about full face to meet similar attack upon himself. The move was timely, and so was the instinct that prompted a dive for the high-and-dry boat where the revolver reposed.

The cat-like leap of the crouching assailant menacing the Bangor boy had its check in a shot that raised the echoes in the open spaces between the ships, the masts of which rose in shadowy outline above the harbor.

Bang! Bang! Billy had a busy finger on the trigger of the automatic. He had no eye for any particular target, with the possible exception of a single instant, when he aimed without effect at the legs of the man who at arm's length was holding Henri down on the planks of the dock, but the good purpose of a general alarm was being served in "cracking" style.

Hurrying shapes appeared in every direction, and by the time the last cartridge in the revolver gripped by Billy had exploded, three or four gendarmes and a dozen or more husky sailors and stevedores were at the scene of disturbance.

Henri was still back down on the dock and Billy in defiant attitude alongside the boat—but more than these two the newcomers failed to discover. The nightowl couple, baffled in their attempt to put

the Ardelle outfit out of commission, had flown on the wings of the night, and no trace of them could be found. They left, however, souvenirs in the shape of a hatchet and a marline-spike.

The boys were saved stern interrogation on the part of the armed police by the authoritative up-coming of Legarde, who turned loose some rapid-fire French, which had the effect of scattering the officers and dockmen as active searchers up and down and all around the wharf region.

"You lads hold lucky numbers when it comes to getting into the thick of things," was the greeting of Legarde to the boys after he had dissolved the crowd. "Paul reported all quiet when he came in, and here you are picking up excitement in chunks."

"We weren't looking for it, boss, I assure you." This assertion of Billy's had the endorsement of his chum, who had been grabbed unawares, and had red marks on his neck to show for it.

"If Buddy there hadn't been so quick on his feet," added Henri, "this company of ours would have been mighty short of traveling facilities in the morning."

"And if he had not been so quick on the trigger this night would have been mighty short of noise," joked Legarde.

This exchange of talk was interrupted by the arrival of Paul Folsom, Littell and Pingree, the assembling an indication that no more chances

would be taken in regard to the flying and floating stock.

At daybreak a runner from the hotel came to the wharf with a can of hot coffee and a supply of sandwiches, this refreshment supplemented by speedy preparation for the return journey.

Legarde and Paul were the first to fly, and their biplane had the start of a mile before Billy and Henri sent the seaplane aloft, leaving the motor-boatmen to work their lowly and slower way in the Channel.

"It's up here, Buddy, that we get the best of it," declared the young pilot, when the sailing was covering fifty miles an hour. "For every shakeup given us on the ground I have two wishes for a getaway like this."

"Just like the sailor in a storm at sea who says he is 'sorry for the poor folks on shore in this wild weather.' " Henri gave the motors a little more force, and had the satisfaction of seeing the biplane guided by Paul at closer range with every forward sweep of the airship.

Hardly a quarter of a mile separated the two machines, when Billy noted that the flyers in advance were circling in spiral descent, and the objective point of alighting was a platform extension on the deck of a warship.

"A pretty piece of work!" exclaimed the young enthusiast at the seaplane wheel. "Takes a master

hand to do that. There, they've hit it like the fall of a feather bed! Bully!"

As the big hydroplane closely passed over the mighty cruiser, Henri trailed the dark red streamer, the sign of the British warbird. The aviators on the platform flourished their caps in response, and in continuing flight the Young Aeroplane Scouts were responsible only to themselves for anything that might happen in following the air route to London.

Such was the pace, it seemed no time at all before Pilot Billy had the Thames underneath as a guiding line to the metropolis, and in an even hour sixty-six miles had been traversed. This brought the seaplane to hovering halt over the Albert dock.

Twenty minutes later the craft had been delivered where it belonged, and the boys were on their way, in a motor-bus, to report to Lieutenant Morgan at the headquarters of the Royal Aviation Corps.

That officer, at sight of the young recruits, tendered a welcome that had no lack of warmth. "And my good friend, Ardelle," he questioned, "where is he?"

"Gone to visit some German friends," advised Billy, setting forth, immediately, however, the circumstances connected with the perilous undertaking of the French agent.

"Not many dull moments in his company, eh?"

"The peaceful ones could be more easily counted, sir," was Billy's reply.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOLLOWING A NEW TRAIL.

"HELLO, Mr. Adams." Billy, with Henri close behind, had his head in the doorway of the room occupied by the renowned Horatio at Scotland Yard.

"Blow me, if it isn't the boy never born to be kidnaped," vociferated the detective. "And here's the other blokey, too. Tip us your fins, youngsters. Where's the big fellow?"

"Same question up at headquarters," said Billy. "You've heard about the boy who disappeared from the burning deck, haven't you, sir?"

"What ship, sonny?" Adams from force of habit reached for his notebook.

"Quit it." Henri fixed a laughing eye on his chum.

"Only a bit of tragic verse, Mr. Adams," explained Billy. "If anybody should ask you what became of the hero tell him just to 'ask the winds.' As to Mr. Ardelle, I give you the same answer. He may be at Lille, and, again, he may not."

"If he started for that town, he's there," declared

the Scotland Yarder in most positive manner. "That man's old Nick when it comes to getting through."

"You were not forgotten when the chief made the jump over the border," assured Billy. "He told us to hand you this." The young aviator pulled the silver case from his pocket, and laid it on the table.

Adams cast a slightly suspicious glance at the lad, to make sure that it was all in earnest. Upon inspection of the case, however, curiosity took the lead of every other thought, and the detective nervously felt for the spring that threw the top. Between stubby thumb and forefinger he lifted to the light a card covered with fine and closely spaced writing. Growing interest was manifested by the reader in the way of a low whistle, with a lift on the last note.

"Do you know what this is?" The sudden query was addressed to Billy.

The Bangor boy shook his head. "I had no other instructions than to deliver the case to you," he quietly replied.

"No offense, my lad," quickly apologized Adams. "I spoke before thinking. Now let me tell you both," he earnestly continued, "that you have carried the key which will open quite a chapter of inside history."

The detective spent the next few minutes in transferring a copy of the card writing to his notebook,

a leather-bound record showing marks of long service, and which its owner carefully closed with a broad rubber band.

"What's on the flying bill for the next day or two?" he asked, after a moment's deliberation.

Billy and Henri jointly asserted that they did not know of any special assignment pending.

"Trot along, lads, perhaps I'll see you later." With this advice, Adams himself gave sign of departure, but in different direction from that taken by the boys.

"That card certainly set the old man going," observed Billy during the walk back to the aviation corps station.

"And maybe that will put the move on somebody else," surmised Henri. "Even us. That question about what we had in expectation was not an idle one, believe me."

This anticipation was not misplaced, for the boys had hardly completed the evening meal when they were summoned from the mess-room to the office of the lieutenant.

"It's becoming quite a task to keep you at home," said the directing aviator. "But the call is imperative and not to be denied."

The Young Aeroplane Scouts would not have required more than one guess to picture the man who now wanted their service. However, the nature

and scope of the mission in which they were to participate was far less easy of reckoning.

Billy ventured an inquiry as to the probable hour of reporting for the unknown duty; but even the lieutenant was unable to throw any light on that particular point of the game.

"The hour has been fixed for a little talk you are going to have here, and that is within an inch on the clock," said the officer looking up at the time-piece over his desk. "Beyond this, you know about as much as I do."

It will not be surprising to state that the third party in the "little talk" proved to be one Horatio Adams, who came in with a grave air of importance. After exchanging greetings with the Scotland Yard man, Lieutenant Morgan hastened away on his evening tour of inspection.

"Know anything about the lay of the land around London?" This was Adams' first question, and he was apparently anxious for a favorable reply.

Billy looked at Henri, and Henri looked at Billy. The latter was the spokesman. "Not a great deal—any great distance from the sea, I mean. We did a good bit of flying about when we worked with Captain Johnson at Dover, but never far from the water."

"Ever near Norfolk?" The detective leaned forward in his chair, with an expectant look.

"That's where Sandringham, the royal hall, is,"

exclaimed Henri, "and that's only three miles from the sea."

"Right you are, laddie," declared Adams, "and it's also in the territory upon which my mind's eye is dwelling this very minute. The lightning change artist that sent you back here with the little piece of cardboard has furnished a lead which already has thrown an unseen guard around the hiding places of not less than twenty suspects right here in the city, and pointed the trail of half as many more further afield. All top-notchers, too, in the secret service business for the enemy."

"Why didn't the chief work on the information himself?" This is what Billy wanted to know.

"Hadn't got clear to the bottom of the cipher that you brought into camp after the knockabout at the hotel, and when those two cunning heads got together down on the coast—well, the results are here." Adams laid his hand over the pocket that held the notebook.

"The chief must have divided up the information," suggested Henri, "for he came mighty near bagging a good-sized fox right at the jump. The luck all ran against him, though, and the net didn't hold."

"I'll warrant he will get back at somebody for that before he is a month older—that is, on his own hook. As for this end, the big fellow has put us in fine trim to make a haul if something doesn't slip."

The Scotland Yard representative had a lot of faith in the French agent, and was not slow in expressing that high degree of confidence.

Billy thought it was about time for some definite statement in relation to the part that his chum and himself were expected to take in Adams' plan of action. "Would you mind," he queried, "giving us a tip on the program, and what we are billed to do?"

"In the first act," smilingly advised the detective, "you will be passengers on a train which will leave London for the north in forty-five minutes."

"And then what?" persisted the Bangor boy.

"Don't rush the play," said Adams evasively, "but just hurry along yourselves and put on something to keep out the cold."

At Victoria station Billy and Henri, conducted by their new and self-elected boss, had an introduction to three stoutly built persons, each with that quietly determined demeanor that goes to the makeup of good fighters in a pinch. There was still another, to whom no introduction was necessary—Demonet, the aviation instructor from Pau, and their comrade in the Royal Corps.

"Not altogether ground work," thought Billy, "with him in the company." Henri had the same idea.

As the train pulled out, the boys made it their particular arrangement to sit as near as possible to

the one of their profession, in the hope of getting some knowledge of what was coming at the end of the mysterious journey.

"I haven't much the best of you in advance figuring on this trip," said the veteran flyer as the fast train sped through the darkness and while the several detectives were occupied in argument among themselves. "As I understand it, Adams has secret advices that there is a nest of spies in Norfolk county vicinity, just where I have not yet been told by him, but I am tolerably sure we will all get off at Norwich."

"That's the capital of the county, isn't it?" asked Henri.

"Yes," replied Demonet, "and a factory town of good size. Haven't been there for quite awhile, but if everybody there is working like they did before the war you will find it a busy place."

"What bothers me," remarked Billy, "is picking up the reason for pal and I being in this thing. It was different with Ardelle. He knew us and we knew him; there was supposed to be a man we could identify at that hotel, and that explained the call then for our service. But on this job, I can't yet see why we are wanted. Adams is hardly an acquaintance of two days, and with a trained force from which to select, what's the meaning of our look-in?"

120 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

Demonet smiled at the exhibit of perplexity on the part of his young friend. "Perhaps Scotland Yard is short of aviators just now," he quietly observed, "or, again, perhaps Ardelle gave you fellows the push that kept you going with this new expedition. That's where my shove came from, I believe."

The boys had their turn at a grin when this last sentence was uttered. They were well aware, putting two and two together, that the speaker and Ardelle were team-mates, and Demonet's "believe" sounded funny to the shrewd youngsters.

It was the bluff Horatio who had the next word, and the word meant that the train ride was nearing a finish. Even then station lights were flashing into the car windows, and five minutes later the boss detective led his party across the platform to waiting motor-cars, the drivers of which immediately gave sign that their presence was by special instruction.

Adams addressed one of them as "Dave," followed by a low-keyed consultation between the two.

"Is this Norwich?" In answer to Billy's inquiry, Demonet affirmed the naming by a nod of assent.

"Saw it from topside once," put in Henri.

The Scotland Yard chief, hearing the statement, turned to say: "There's still another look coming

to you," for which grim humor "Dave" scared up a laugh in his throat.

Within twelve hours the boys saw an underlying landscape at many angles.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXCITING PERFORMANCE.

DAY was breaking very rapidly, and the first rays of the rising sun glinted on the surface of a small bay behind the cliffs of Norfolk coast. A mile to the eastward a railway line extended through a wide stretch of country, where dwellings were few and far between, and of the old style of architecture, centered in wooded grounds of considerable extent.

Following the track of the steam road a pedestrian figure moved with rapid and tireless gait, in the manner of a walking inspector in railway service. It was evident, however, that the condition of the roadbed was of far less interest to the lonely wayfarer than the general outlook around and about. He would stop frequently and, producing a field-glass from the leather case suspended at the shoulder, sweep the expansive level in every direction and to the limit of vision.

His had been a journey of night, for an electric torch bulged one of the pockets of his shooting-

jacket, a part of the regulation outfit in the sport of pheasant killing on large estates. Standing against his record also as a peaceful citizen were two army pistols concealed at his hips and a sharpened bayonet fitted into an oak staff or cane.

Suddenly the single marcher changed his course of advance, left the track and struck off to the right and coastward. Then something that the traveler's glass had failed to discover broke loose. From behind huge rocks, and here and there like magic from the gorse, sprang armed men, and all endeavoring to get between the now fugitive and the sea.

The man pursued dodged and doubled like a hare, eluded the leaders of the chase, gained the shore at the point of a low-hanging cliff, and with pistol shots ringing behind him plunged into the water within a hundred yards of the little bay, towards which he commenced swimming. He had discarded his pistols, bayonet and torch, their weight having made his progress very slow. Nearing the bay he blew a long blast on the whistle clenched between his teeth.

Within the bay a ripple spread, and above the surface the bow, the gun and the conning tower of a submarine were showing. Another piercing pipe of the whistle, and the underwater machine was darting to the rescue of the swimmer.

Then a new element mixed in the exciting performance, heralded by shouts from the cliffs over-

124 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

head—the whir and buzz of aircraft were in hearing, two monoplanes of high power and two of the larger type of warbirds, in the biplane class.

One of the aviators dropped a smoke bomb, in signal to a forty-knot destroyer moving in the wake of the aircraft, but before the annihilating force of the deadly torpedo boat could be brought within operating range both struggling swimmer and submarine had vanished, and with all its equipment of steel nets the destroyer was unable to make a catch.

On the cliff a burly person decidedly out of sorts tramped about, using harsh words that snapped like a whip lash, and it was not until the aviators had abandoned their search for the undersea boat and gracefully volplaned to the plateau that he subsided and turned a listening ear to the lively queries of the airmen.

The very first of the operators to briskly bound out of one of the larger machines was Legarde, and with Paul a close second, slightly in advance of the drivers of the other biplane, none other than Billy and Henri. The monoplaneists were Demonet and the British expert, Hiram Randall.

In the shaping of Adams' plans, during the passage of four days in coast territory, it was Demonet's idea to secure the services of the experienced coast patrolmen, last seen by the boys alighting on the deck of the warship in the Channel near Dover, and Randall joined the company in Norwich.

The torpedo boat, with which the Briton was serving as aerial guide, had been for some time engaged in "fishing" for submarines along this coast, but the armored diver in which the daring suspect had just escaped slipped into the cliff-enclosed bay without springing a trap. The waiting method employed by Randall's boatmen comrades was this:

Nets are hung from hollow glass balls—glass, so that the submarine periscope cannot pick them out against the surface of the sea. When a glass ball disappears the torpedo boat is on the job in a jiffy, waiting for the victim in the net to come up—if ever she can. The rest is easy.

For three days, from one morning to the next, and continuing, a certain country house had been constantly shadowed in relays by the London sleuths, and the period of inaction had worn the patience of the boy aviators almost to a frazzle. Demonet had gone after Legarde and Paul.

The sight of their former comrades in adventure at Dunkirk was a hurrah event with Billy and Henri, and when the airmen set to work at tuning, in preparation for any time expected flight, the boys were thoroughly content.

"Mr. Adams is going to have eye-strain if he hangs around that house much longer," Billy told Legarde, "and it's been a waste of time, it seems to me."

"The cat and the mouse, my lad," said the Frenchman; "it was ever thus when you have to play spectator."

It was along about midnight that "Dave" the motor-car driver, arrived with stirring information for the boss detective. "Somebody's queered the deal!" he excitedly announced. "A fellow came down here this afternoon rigged up as a sportsman, and pumped that idiot Riggs. I wasn't at the station myself, and just got onto the facts at Fitz's bar."

Adams sprang at his informant like a tiger, and close to striking, when he changed raging tactics and sternly commanded the awakening of every sleeper in the weary watching party.

"Get your car here in a brace of shakes!" he cried at the shaking "Dave," though the latter was near enough to hear a whisper. The big touring automobile filled up like a police patrol wagon and dashed away into the darkness, more than one of the hastily loaded passengers having scarce time to get a balance on the footboard. Only the aviators were left behind.

Demonet, however, knew just what the airmen were expected to do in such emergency, but their participation would prove of no avail in this instance until sufficient light should lift in the east to enable them to mark a course and distinguish movement on ground and water from aloft.

The minute the gray succeeded the black in the

atmosphere, Demonet and Randall climbed into their monoplanes and drove at a merry clip for the coast; guiding northeast as the crow flies, Legarde, Paul, Billy and Henri speeded after the leaders in the biplanes.

Randall got a signal from the torpedo boat, with which he was identified, but it was not until the aircraft made the turn for a spreading view of the coast area that discovery was made of the commotion on the cliff, started by Adams and his trailing crew in their strenuous endeavor to head off the speedy runner they were pursuing.

"There's a high dive for you!" shouted Henri, who had full view from the observer's seat in the biplane of the lofty plunge made by the daring fugitive. "They'll get him sure, though." The young aviator could see the torpedo boat cutting a swathe in the waves by swift approach, but of the hidden submarine there was yet no sign.

"What's the matter with that?" This was Billy's top note when he saw the swimmer drawn into the hatch of the suddenly uplifted submarine.

The only answer to the loudly-voiced question was Henri's "Mind your eye, Buddy," when the biplane swerved dangerously near to the wasp machine carrying Randall.

Then the whole winged flock settled in a circle around the storming central figure on the ground—Horatio Adams of Scotland Yard.

"Don't think I'm the dummy," was the opening and emphatic declaration of the baffled detective, when the aviators got within hearing.

As none of the airmen had made or intended to make any such accusation, the uncalled for assertion started a laugh, and also Adams to going with a string of explanations. He promised faithfully to throw the chief offender, Riggs, into the sea at the very first opportunity.

"If ever there was a clear case of 'nobody home,' it's under the hat of that Riggs," solemnly concluded the speaker.

The returning party, however, had not been in Norwich an hour before Adams lost his injured air. The contents of a telegram from London was his tonic. "Got three of 'em in town last night," he boasted. "Not so bad after all."

That it was the immediate intention of the Scotland Yarder to take train for the metropolis was impressed upon the boys by his advice to them that they had only a little time to exchange good-byes with their flying friends—about fifteen minutes, to be exact.

In the corridor of the car of the fast express bearing them to London, Henri amused himself, as he often did, in character study, guessing at the employment, business or profession of this and that person within the range of inspection.

He had under observation during the passing of

several stations an elderly gentleman with a front view of the Santa Claus order, his broad vest measure crossed by a heavy gold chain with dangling seals. This traveler, in a well-cut suit of tweeds, radiated substantial reason to be satisfied with himself and the world. What interested Henri, and almost to the point of fascination, was a certain way the man had of looking about him, a restless movement hardly noticeable to anybody but a continuous watcher, and one strangely familiar to the boy.

Where had he noted before this apparently-seeing-nothing-and-really-seeing-all manner possessed by the stranger?

"Say, pal," Henri whispered to his chum, "of whom does that Britisher opposite us remind you?"

"Which one?" was Billy's counter-question.

"The fellow with the mutton-chops and the big waist. Just size him up for a minute or two."

In hardly more than the mentioned time, the Bangor boy glimpsed that peculiar trait of the heavy-weight passenger which had attracted his flying partner.

He showed a puzzled expression in his face. Then, all of a sudden, memory hit a resounding chord, and by lip movement Billy was spelling a name.

It was "R-o-q-u-e!"

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT HAPPENED IN FLEET STREET.

IF it was surely the master craftsman and directing power of the German secret service, his identity was so cleverly merged into the character he was playing that the one slightly betraying habit, which jogged the memory of these keen-eyed lads, who had known the wonderful deceiver so well, seemed more and more simply a freak of imagination.

Billy and Henri made it a point of trying to get themselves noticed by the supposed substantial Briton, but without encouragement. The comfortable girth, with London drawing nigh, was surrounded by a copy of *The Times*, secured by the reader at a station of recent passing, and over the top of which printed curtain could be seen only the crown of a traveling-cap.

As the train stopped at the platform of Victoria station, the big man in the tweeds very leisurely reached for the rack containing his top-coat and valise, and as deliberately stepped into the crowd moving toward the exit gates.

The boys were compelled to wait near the railings for the tardy coming of Detective Adams, who had lingered to greet a waiting messenger from the Yard, with a report that took several minutes in the telling. Out in Victoria Street, before they had a chance to look around, the young aviators were bundled into a cab by the now hurrying sleuth.

"Bow Street," was the direction given the cabman, who evidently recognized the detective, and who gave the youthful companions of the latter a stare which fixed them as some sort of culprits. It proved that a big jail was at the other end of the ride, in the gloomy precincts of which were held the trio of suspects, over the capture of whom Adams was inwardly rejoicing.

He was also entertaining the secret hope that from among the prisoners the young aviators might be able to pick at least one that they had encountered in their travels with the famous secret agent in Teuton territory. Of the past experience of these lads the Scotland Yarder had learned much from Ardelle.

But in this last desire Adams was doomed to disappointment. The boys had really never seen any of the cell-dwellers with whom they came face to face, and even had it been otherwise, against the grain of Billy and Henri would have ground hard the cold proposition of driving a nail in the coffin of any one, and especially a man with whom they had

once broken the bread of comradeship, however brought about. The warmth of an open fight was a different matter.

Of grateful relief then was the getting away from locks and bars and prison odor and into the outer air. Of little care that a misting rain dampened the way through the Strand—that way looked good to Billy and Henri.

“Sorry to part with you, my lads,” said Adams, when he had hailed a motor-bus going the route that would take the boys near the aviation corps headquarters. “Maybe, though, we will meet again in the near sometime.”

“If there is to be as much sitting around for us in the next excursion as there was in this one,” commented Billy, when his chum and himself were free of their company, “I wish that ‘sometime’ a further stretch than ‘near.’”

“The last act wasn’t so bad, Buddy,” argued Henri, “the flying, the shooting and that dandy dive off the cliff. What more do you want?”

“But how about the gazing camp, holding for three days around that old shack of many gables?”

Henri paid no attention to this retort. His thoughts had again centered on the puzzle presented by the now-you-see-it-and-now-you-don’t living picture on the train coming back to London.

“Do you know, pal,” he lamented, “I’m just a bit creepy yet with that curious sensation which struck

me when I got a line on the old Roque trick of eye-working? It's keeping me guessing without rest."

"There you are, starting something to bother," protested Billy. "For one minute I was ready to make an affidavit that it was the same move I had seen a hundred times; then the other part didn't fit, and so the belief cracked like glass. What's the odds, anyhow?"

"And look what's fallen from the sky." This greeting from Devlin, the hangar guard, posing in front of the aviation station. "Or is it in the Tower among the jewels you've been hiding?"

"You look like you had been losing sleep on our account," jollied Billy in return.

"Never the loss of a wink," bantered the guard. "I always feel safe in thinking that if ever a Barry falls, his feet light first. But they'll be serving the banquet in a few minutes, and you'd better come inside."

"I'm quite sure a Barry will 'fall for that,'" laughed Henri.

"As true as truth in the dictionary," cheerfully admitted Billy.

When the boys paraded into the messroom they were personally conducted by Lieutenant Morgan, who announced to the assembled company that thanks should be given that these young flyers had not been returned in pieces. "I assure you, gentle-

men," he smilingly concluded, "that they are all here."

This happy vein ran into the following morning, when Billy and Henri were graciously informed that this was their "day off." The directing officer also intimated that for new recruits they had been having an unusual run of steady work, and he thought they were entitled to a vacation. "Just go out and look over the town like you owned it," he advised, "and here's an order on the paymaster to help along. I know I don't have to tell you to be good."

"Take pa's hand and you won't be run over." Billy was real skittish at the prospect of a holiday, and he hauled his chum by the wrist all the way to the pay office, in the middle section of the arcade, where they stopped, breathless, to transfer a little pile of half-crowns and shillings from the counter to their pockets.

"Is it the British Museum, the House of Commons or London Bridge?" This was the last fire of Devlin, as the boys passed the jolly guard on the way out.

"Not to-day, old man," announced Billy over his shoulder. "We've an engagement with the lord-mayor for the morning, and expect to dine at the Savoy with the duke of nowhere."

"G'wan," said Devlin, replacing the pipe in his lips with a comical grin.

"He knows as much about our route as we do," laughed Henri.

"We'll just knock around, and if we run into any of the show places we'll give them the honor of a glance." This was Billy's free lance idea.

The ramble of the young explorers carried them into the great square where is located the Bank of England, the Stock Exchange and Mansion House, the official home of the lord-mayor, with whom, however, the boys failed to "keep their engagement."

Henri soon discovered that they were going over some of the same ground they had traversed just after the last big Zeppelin scare, and he suggested a walk in Lombard Street for a change. Here was the money region, the so-called "counting house of the world," and as the boys had less than five pounds in hard cash between them, they felt this was no place for them, so the next shift was to Victoria Street, where the business exhibit was of far greater variety. Then the walkers drifted to Fleet Street, and a decidedly hungry pair by this time. It happened that the first restaurant coming to their notice in this busy thoroughfare was one of fame in olden days, and still of reputation as a noted place to eat, much frequented by foreigners, and with a "homey" front.

"This looks good to me," remarked Billy, "and I really believe I smell the perfume of pot-pie. There

might be baked beans, too, inside, for all we know."

"Lead me to 'em!" exclaimed Henri, jingling the coins in his pocket.

While these words were passing, and just as the boys were turning into the doorway of the café, they were jostled by a swaggering youth in a new plaid suit, sporting a fancy-colored handkerchief around his neck, knotted under the chin and brilliantly flowing over his vest front.

"Look where you're going, you ducks," was the rude address of the real offender.

Billy was instantly inclined to resent the action and manner of the fellow, but the fist he made as quickly relaxed.

"Max!" The name voiced in amazement by the Bangor boy.

Here in a London street Billy was eye to eye with an enemy of former days—the Bremen bruiser he had met and whipped in a bare-knuckle encounter on the aviation grounds at Hamburg—the revengeful bully who later attempted to take the life of the victor by spiking at midnight the rudder of the monoplane in which the young American was to ride next day.

"No hard feelings, I hope," whined the flashily attired rounder, whose bluff had departed under the steady gaze of the now calmly judicial Billy. "I'm a much better lad than I used to be."

"There sure was room for improvement," grimly

commented the young aviator. "What are you doing here?" The question was peremptory.

"Had a job on a steamer line, but lost it three weeks ago. My aunt on Charlotte Street has been holding me up since that."

"She has a pretty load on her hands, I guess, better luck to her." Billy plainly intended to be tart in his speech.

"Come now, covey," pleaded Max, "don't be nasty with a poor cuss that's sorry for what he did, and I'm half starved this day, as it is."

"But you're wearing circus clothes just the same," observed Billy.

"Got 'em before the wages shut off," tearfully explained the subdued rough, "and I'll swear that there isn't as much as a ha'penny in them."

The appeal of unsatisfied hunger was one calculated to touch the heart of the aeroplane scout, and there was that in his change of expression which encouraged Max to add a little more of the sympathy producer.

"My legs are a bit wobbly with all this walking and no eating," he complained, wiping his eyes with the back of a not over-clean hand.

"And I thought it was a swagger," said Billy to himself. "Come along and I'll see that that weak spot is filled up," and the trio sought and took possession of one of the small tables in the restaurant.

The fare was much to the liking of all three, and particularly expert in putting it away was Max.

"This here is making me feel all the worse for my bad ways to you," he sadly stated to Billy, "and I just want to show how much obliged I am for the straight deal you've traded for a crooked one. Haven't you ever missed a little book with a whole lot of writing in it?"

"Indeed I have," earnestly declared the Bangor boy; "in it is the record of our travels from the very start and until we were captured by the Germans. I was going to make a story out of it some day. But I lost the diary somewhere among the hangars at Hamburg, and that's the end of it."

"Cheer up, covey. I'm comin' back at you for this feed—I've got your scribbling; found it on a repair bench, and for the matter of four-pence ha'penny to ride us to Charlotte Street you'll have it to stow in your togs. Is it worth the trouble?"

"Worth the trouble, and worth something to you," readily assented Billy, "and let's go right away."

The jest of Guard Devlin about "a Barry always falling feet first" was in process of proving.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THE BOYS WERE FOOLED.

FOR never a minute in their motor-bus journey did the Young Aeroplane Scouts have the slightest suspicion of Max as a schemer or as playing a double rôle—indeed, they hardly credited to that bullet-head of his more than enough brain power to keep him going as a roustabout. Billy had realized in the past that the fellow had a mighty ugly disposition, but that he was an actor of sufficient adroitness to deceive two sharp young men of the world, like Henri and himself, was not conceivable. While it might not be of ordinary occurrence, this meeting in Fleet Street with the former hangar acquaintance, yet anything may happen in London, and it appeared to be perfectly natural, Max having claimed knowledge of Billy's notebook, that he could produce it, as stated.

Leaving the bus, the boys found themselves in entirely different surroundings from other quarters of the metropolis they had visited that day, in a side street with evidence still of occupancy not altogether real British.

"How far does that aunt of yours live?" asked Billy, who had no intention of wasting what was left of the hard-won holiday in this uninteresting manner.

"Getting close now," assured Max, who had resumed his swagger, and giving no further sign of being a mariner in distress. "Just 'round the corner, and we're there."

What the guide called "there" was a small building squeezed between two big ones, apparently used as a lodging house.

"Walk in, my covies," invited Max, leering at the boys from within the door he had opened without the formality of knocking, "you're as welcome as hot cakes on a cold morning."

Then for the first time since the ride and walk to this neighborhood, Billy had a stroke of instinct which prompted retreat. But he did not yield to the inward warning, nor yet to the pull at the coat-sleeve applied by Henri, who evidently had some apprehension of his own. It was broad daylight, a helmet and a bluecoat could be seen not far away, and passersby were numerous. Besides, the Bangor boy was not the least bit afraid of Max, and he wanted his precious and long-lost notebook.

So the young aviators permitted themselves to be ushered into a large room at the rear of the second floor, first ascending a short flight of heavily carpeted stairs. The apartment they entered presented

a gloomy interior, the curtains of the two windows, right and left, closely drawn. But there was a red glow from a slow-burning grate fire, which somewhat relieved the chill impression and held back the shadows brooding about the walls and the heavy oak furnishings. No sooner had the boys crossed the threshold when the massive door closed behind them with the sharp click of a spring-lock. Max was on the other side of the solid portal.

Henri made a grab for the knob, twisted and pulled, but he could not budge the paneled barrier. "You're a chump and so am I," he snapped at Billy.

"Don't talk so loud, or you'll scare Max's aunt," Billy had determined to make the best of a bad joke, and this caution to his irritated chum had the effect of setting them both to laughing.

And it was a nervous start given to both of them when the outburst of merriment found echo from the depths of a huge easy-chair drawn up before the fire, which deep seat of rest and comfort had escaped the notice of the boys during Henri's attack on the door.

"You have the right spirit, young sirs." That voice! The young aviators stood spellbound—the old chief, or his ghost, was speaking. He was not showing in the flesh at the moment, but yet being heard in mysterious way.

Directly, however, the deep chair gave up its dead, or, rather, as was demonstrated, its very much alive

sitter—the very same passenger who had kept the boys guessing all the way from Norwich to London.

“I knew it was he,” cried Henri, in triumph, “though that disguise is just about perfect!”

“I’m in on this,” maintained Billy. “Didn’t I say it was——”

The rotund figure by the chair lifted a hand. “Joseph Henry Gaines. Let me complete the sentence for you, young man.”

With the boys getting back to normal conditions of mind, and realizing that this was a prearranged meeting, they were saddled with another thought, and that was, now being corraled, what purpose would they serve? Billy and Henri made each a firm mental resolve that the only method of compelling a change of service for them at this time must be, to win, a dragging out by the heels, and any blowing-up ventures, as in Warsaw, would find them breaking a leg to get away.

Roque was still living in the character he had assumed—for it was none other than this wonderful and versatile secret agent behind all this remarkable make-up of wig, padding and flesh paint—and he well sustained the genial manner of the bluff and hearty Briton of landed estate or comfortable bank account.

As in the past, the boys wondered again at the continuing effort to deceive, when all occasion for it had departed. But it seemed that if this master-

ful man had even one vanity, it must have been this juggling with the high art of disguise.

Billy and Henri were well aware, though, also in the light of former experience, that the iron would be showing through the veneer in due time, and they were looking for it any minute.

The lads, then, were not misled by the insinuating address of the heavy-weight, hands behind him, and back to the fire, when he asked them in even tone how they had been faring since he had last seen them in Warsaw.

"We have covered a lot of territory, for one thing," advised Billy, "from frozen footing to burning sands, and—well, I could furnish a mile of details if you cared to listen."

"Anything of recent date will do, to make a long story short," said Roque, with a sharp glance at the boy.

Henri in seemingly careless way touched elbows with his chum. He knew that thin ice had been reached.

"Only a little skylarking lately, sir," lightly remarked Billy; "nothing like the old days we tackled, with the smoke and fire of a thousand guns under our 'planes."

Roque made a gesture of impatience at this, and his cultivated smile was gone.

"You've been traveling with that fellow, Ardelle, haven't you?" he abruptly asked.

"Gee whiz," thought Billy, "the shoe is pinching now!" Then aloud: "Just met the gentleman here a week or two ago, much to our surprise."

"Not to him, I vow," was Roque's grim observation. "But your first meeting was not the last?"

"Hardly," admitted Billy.

"You are saving your breath in this talk, young man," and it was the stern accent of the commander cropping out. "What I want to know I will know. Where's the man now?"

"Couldn't tell you," doggedly asserted Billy.

"Are you not aware—tell me," raged Roque, aiming his index finger at the boy's face, "that Ardelle is at the bottom of the doings which already have put three brave men behind prison bars and will send them to execution? You saw them yesterday, in company with that blunderhead policeman."

"Who gave that away?" Billy had turned questioner.

"Do you think for a single minute," demanded Roque, "that since you left the train, you have made a move which was not watched and noted?"

"That may account, Buddy, for the 'accidental' meeting with Max," was Henri's suggestion to his chum.

"Rest assured," interposed Roque, "that meeting was no accident. We bait with all kinds of meat."

"Did that skunk invent the notebook story him-

self?" Billy was nursing an angry memory of the tale by which he was fooled.

"Invent nothing, the dolt! You left the book when you changed your clothes in my house at Hamburg. I sent the jackanapes to bring you in, and he did it. A smarter man might have failed."

"Oh, he worked us all right, but he'll get his bumps when next we come together." Billy's lips were set in straight lines.

"Come, come, my lad," wheedled Roque, changing tactics, "tell me how and when Scotland Yard got the information upon which it has been working, and when you add to that the present whereabouts of Ardelle you can take Max out in the courtyard and thump him to your heart's content; then go where you will, with only your promise to keep your mouth shut."

"My promise wouldn't be worth much after breaking faith like you want me to do. You'd have skinned us alive for the same thing when we were under your command."

"That he would," put in Henri.

Roque saw that he was up against a stubborn proposition, and a new process of persuasion was necessary. Torture or other extreme cruel practice the secret agent would not employ to bring these boys to terms, for in truth he had a certain fondness for them, so the taking away of the precious

gift of liberty for a time was the method most available.

As a final effort, though, this crafty person recalled the close relations of the three in the thrilling past and urged again and again that the lads give him their confidence. But Billy and Henri were no more to be shaken by this line of argument than they were by threatening attitude.

"The flying corps will look in vain for your return," intimated Roque, "and it will be no difficult matter to start the belief that you are rank deserters. How does that strike you?"

"In a way that hurts," quietly replied Billy, "but not as much as it would if we played traitor at your bidding."

Roque pursued the argument no further. He saw it was useless, for the present at least. With long stride he crossed the room, pulled aside a dingy curtain, revealing a door of low frame, less wide than the front one, but of the same solid oak finish. With the creak of its opening, Roque beckoned to the boys to pass through.

The way was upward, by narrow staircases, one succeeding another at each of three landings above. It was not until the last floor had been reached that the now sullen and silent Roque paused for breath after the long climb.

This, however, was not the finish of the ascent. There was an entrance from the garret-like place

into the next building, rising two stories higher, the topmost one extending, without partition, the entire length of the larger structure.

Pushing the boys before him, Roque swept with a glance this immense lounging room. Probably a dozen men were seated or lolling in various positions of leisure, three or four, in their shirtsleeves, playing at some game of cards.

"Heinrich," imperiously called the chief—and there was instant response on the part of a robust youth, who had been reclining, hands under head, on a broken-down sofa.

"At your service, sir," politely stated, in German, the handsome young fellow addressed, showing a fine set of teeth by a pleasant smile.

"The service is," said Roque, "to see that these boys are carefully looked after—carefully, mind you, and kept from exposure to the outer air." There was a grim humor in the latter part of the admonition, which caused another exhibit of Heinrich's teeth.

"They will not be permitted to catch cold, sir, by any sudden change," laughingly assured the merry Teuton.

Billy looked at Henri, as much as to say, "if there is any change it will be as sudden and soon as we can make it."

CHAPTER XVII.

WON OUT IN A NERVE TEST.

WITH Heinrich gaily acting as conductor for the reluctant guests, Roque having vanished, the boys joined the company in the center of the room. Their guide was hailed as "Happy" by his companions—"Happy, 'where'd you make the raise?"—"Happy, why don't you introduce us?"—Happy this and Happy that, until the good-natured fellow stuck his fingers in his ears to get relief from the clamor.

In his own language he told the jovial noisemakers to "hold their mouths," and secured chairs for the boys near one of the big windows, where they were followed by many curious glances. No one, however, ventured to disturb them by questioning, and, shortly, the men re-engaged in what they were doing before the interruption.

When Heinrich, too, finally left the lads to their own thoughts, Billy made a stealthy movement to the nearest window. Any chance of escape the boy would be very willing to accept, no matter the risk, if it had the least promise of success. The outlook

was to the rear of the tall building, and to the eye it was a long way down, that wilderness of black courts, clotheslines and garbage cans. There were no fire-ladders in sight on the gray brick walls, sheer, save for the window ledges, from cornice to base, but the viewer had a glimpse, within easy reach, of a line of spouting, hooked to the roof gutter and descending, in ribbed sections, to the ground.

Using the telegraph code, with which both boys were familiar, and which they had found so handy one ticklish time in Bremen, Billy softly tapped on the pane before him, for the benefit of his chum, who remained sitting, a brief message about the spouting route.

Henri nodded understanding, at the same time keeping tab on the members of the company nearest to him.

To swing out of a six-story window onto the frail support of an uncertain thread of rusty-jointed pipe, with a vacuum of a hundred and thirty feet underneath, would hardly appeal to one unaccustomed to trifling with dizzy heights. But the young aviators had no tremor inside at the idea. All they wanted was the opportunity. As to a break for liberty by the way they entered, there was hardly the ghost of a show.

It was growing dusk in the big apartment, with the passing of early evening, and light had been applied to several lamps swinging in brackets from

the ceiling. Among the company the larger number were preparing for some expedition outside, and with variable intent, indicated by attire, two or three in swallow-tails and white fronts, another in bus driver make-up, one rigged like a café waiter, and so on.

"There must be a masquerade somewhere in the block," whispered Billy to his pal.

"Fancy Roque having anybody about who was not working," chuckled Henri.

In less than a half hour the tenants of the apartment had been reduced to an even four, Heinrich, the fellow in charge of the wardrobe and the cupboard, and the Young Aeroplane Scouts.

"Give the young friends something to eat," directed Heinrich, and the boys were treated by the ready servitor to a satisfying meal, and not for temperance reasons the fellow was delighted that the boys did not touch the brimming beer steins.

"Ever play pinochle?" inquired Heinrich, shuffling a deck of cards at a table recently vacated by the day players.

"'Old Maid' or 'Beggar My Neighbor,' are my long suit," laughed Billy. His chum knew the game mentioned by Heinrich, but was in no humor to take a hand. The hold-up of Billy and himself was a sore spot that would take more than a few hours to heal.

So Heinrich went at solitaire with a vim, but a

little later, and every now and then, he nodded over the pasteboards and scattered ashes from his pipe on the table.

The wardrobe-keeper and waiter had propped a chair against the wall near the door, elevated his feet to the top of a stool, and directly started a snoring concert. The card shuffler several times used harsh terms in effort to stop the "music" and once threw a metal match-tray at the sleeper. But, growing more and more sleepy himself, Heinrich lost interest in the awakening job.

It was Henri who suggested to the pinochle expert that a window be raised to let out the tobacco smoke, complaining that he was nearly choked by it.

Heinrich told him to do as he pleased, admitting that it was "close" in the room. By the time the boy had hoisted the window, "Happy" was like his nickname in dreamland, his arms folded on the table and his head on top of them.

In first experiment Billy tiptoed towards the entrance, reached over the sprawling sleeper and tried the knob, but the door was locked, and no sign of the key. The boy wished for a second that he had the knowledge of a first-class burglar, the ability to shoot a bolt with a tooth-pick. No telling where the key was concealed, either. A deft probing of the jacket of the heavy breather was without result.

Returning to the center of the room, where Henri stood ready to signal in case of Heinrich's taking a

notion to come out of slumber, Billy in faintest kind of whisper put this in his pal's ear: "Can't waste any more time; door locked; key gone; the window and the spout; it's the only way!"

From the outside quite an air current had begun to blow in through the open window, and it stirred the curly flaxen locks on the fallen head of the sleeping Heinrich, causing that worthy to move and mumble and the boys to catch their breath in fear that the jig was up.

The scare, however, was one of brief duration, for "Happy" took a fresh start as a sound napper, encouraging the young aviators to proceed with their desperate plan of sliding through space and down almost nothing in the way of furnishing a secure hold. When Billy looked out, with one foot over the window-sill, preparing to test the stability of the spouting, he made a new discovery, aided by a reflection of light from a building on the other side of the nearest court, running parallel with the outer wall upon which the fearless lads were about to risk their lives. The brick-work backing the pipe was quite uneven, and to a depth as far as the inspecting youth could see, which, however, and unhappily then, was no great distance. But for so much thankful, Billy got a toe-hold in the first chink, edged sidewise, released his grip on the window-sill and crooked his right arm in the spouting curve just above. The cornice seemed so near that

for an instant the lad was tempted to seek the roof as a getaway route, but the tolerable assurance now that there was both hand and foothold going down kept in favor the decision to descend.

The friendly abutting of the first window ledge below, in the fifth story, enabled Billy to solidly support his weight and await the down-coming of his chum, whose feet and legs were soon visible in a spotlight furnished by some tenant in the opposite building, who had neglected to lower the window curtain. It may be mentioned that, save the top floor back of the structure in which Roque's secret workers gathered, and between the fifth and first floors, counting down, also at the rear, there was not as much as a ray of light showing—shutters up and curtains down.

This fact made window-ledges safe stations in dangerous descent for the escaping pair.

Within twenty feet of the sunken stone surface of an area-way, separating the building base from a very narrow alley, the boys had no regrets over the lack of illuminated windows across the court, further up so gratefully welcomed.

"Steady now, pal," was Billy's whispered advice, "we're getting close to the kitchens, and some cook might give the burglar alarm."

"No joking, Buddy; it is the something that might wake Heinrich that's keeping the lump in my throat. He'd guess the trick in half a second and

get below to give us the glad hand." Henri felt that hesitation in landing was a sure mistake.

"Here goes, then," conceded Billy, and, regardless of clothes damage, he lowered himself like a tree-dwelling squirrel after a buried nut.

Henri so closely followed that he nearly took a tumble on top of his pal, when the latter hit the pavement. As the boys stood panting from their exertions, in the dark area, a door a little to the right of their position, and at the head of a short flight of stone steps, guarded by iron railing, swung inward, shooting a shaft of light clear to the alley.

"The cat is out of the bag, sure," gasped the Trouville lad, "let's make a run for it!"

Billy laid a restraining hand on his pal's arm. In the doorway appeared a figure that gave no evidence of heading a hurry-up party. Indeed, it was somebody with a sleep sign, a long stretch of the arms overhead, accompanied by a yawn. All this could be plainly seen, revealed by the bright beams of a big lamp behind the moving picture.

This performer, unaware that he had an audience, next proceeded to apply a match to a large-bowled pipe he had been holding between his fingers, stepped forward and leaned against the guard railing, puffing smoke rings aloft.

So near now was the smoker that combined extension of the boys' arms would have reached his foot, and if they had attempted a move toward the

alley just then, a hail by the man at the railing would have been sure and certain.

While the lads were silently debating the advisability of making an immediate dash for the open way, the disturber turned full face in their direction.

The young aviators were staring out of the shadows at Max, the bullet-headed decoy responsible for their present troubles.

Billy came very near giving utterance to a mingled note of wrath and challenge at sight of his now thrice proved enemy, forgetting for an instant the still tight place in which Henri and himself were figuring. Another diversion at the moment, however, checked the error of such an outbreak. It was only a dog that made the best and sudden bid for attention, but certainly a live factor in breaking up a hide and seek game. Probably smelling a rat, this animal, a Scotch terrier, jumped out from the doorway, darted between the legs of Max and down the steps like a flash.

The boys, crouching and anticipating sure discovery by the frisking and nosing bunch of hide and hair, marked a change of luck when observing that the rat's trail did not lead their way, but in straight line to the alley.

Max stopped smoking long enough to use his lips as a whistle vent, in endeavor to recall the terrier. Then growling and grumbling, the ill-

humored youth shuffled down into the area in lazy pursuit of the recreant dog.

The boys started to backstep, and Henri was startled at finding himself partly in the damp folds of a dangling spread of cloth. He was under an area clothesline, and somebody had left part of the "wash" attached.

Quick as a wink, an inspiration possessed the Trouville lad—here was the means of putting Max under cover!

Hauling down the underdone "laundry," proving to be a good-sized sheet, Henri got next to his pal with the prize and the word of action.

The Bangor boy suppressed with difficulty a whoop of delight at the prospect of putting the hood on the unsuspecting dog-seeker, whistling and calling "Ginger" up and down the alley.

With all caution, and crawling over the cold stone pavement, avoiding as well as they could the shine of the lamp through the open door, the lads drew closer and closer to the one they proposed making the victim of the shrouding process.

Within ten feet; now five; now three; and Max still facing away from the stalkers. Henri had shaped the sheet in convenient form for casting over the bullet-head, and Billy was ready to do his part in putting a ring of muscle around the arms of the bully he so greatly disliked.

Both boys jumped as one. A muffled cry, a twist-

ing and straining, and Max was flat on his back, helpless and choking. A barrel half filled with ashes caught Billy's eye. "Yank him up," he panted, and adding his strength to Henri's, the pair lifted and dumped their vanquished enemy head-first into the ash-laden barrel.

Then they ran for dear life through the alley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AGAIN IN THE WAR GAME.

EMERGING from the mouth of the alley, the boys reduced their speed to a brisk walk, turning due north in the thoroughfare in which they found themselves, and directly away from the scene of their recent adventure. They were careful to pull their caps forward and elevate their coat-collars, in order to avoid recognition, if they should happen to meet any of the first night acquaintances returning to their secret quarters. Hardly a chance in a hundred of such a happening, but Billy and Henri were acutely alive to the necessity of caution in any vicinity where Roque was operating.

"I couldn't tell for the life of me," said the Bangor boy, "whether we are going forward or backwards. This is a maze of a town at best, and at worse, pal, it is a Chinese puzzle."

"Same thing in Petrograd," cheerfully reminded Henri, "and you'll remember that we were the two innocents who came through like native Russians."

"That we did, old top," agreed Billy, "and, come

to think of it, we can speak to a policeman here with some assurance that he will understand what we say."

There was a "Bobby" at the very next corner, and one who had the map of London well in mind. "You're a long ways out of your latitude, my lads," he advised, "and if you follow your noses as they are pointed now, sometime next summer I'd hear of you getting where you want to go. Walk along to the next block below with me, on my round, and I'll tip you to a boost in the right direction."

The "tip" resulted in the boys climbing aboard a motor-bus which would return them nearly to the place they were seeking.

It was about one o'clock in the morning when Billy and Henri entered the arcade at aviation quarters, and Devlin had just relieved the sentry serving the first half of the night. "Who goes there?" demanded the guard, who knew very well the identity of the intruders, having seen the boys coming up the street. "Advance and tell where you've been."

"I'll hand you the diagram after breakfast," was Billy's reply.

Henri did not stop to exchange remarks with the guard, and beat his chum to the bunks by four minutes.

Supposed to be yet on vacation, the young avia-

tors were not subject to official call in the morning, and slept straight through the mess hour.

"Hello, my fellow flyers; is there glue on your eyelids?"

The voice was Demonet's, and the big aviator laughed at the way the sleepers sprang up in their bunks like jumping-jacks.

"When did you get back?" asked Billy, while reaching for his clothes.

"While you were gone," was the smiling response. "Saw our friend, Detective Adams, this morning, and he's fighting mad again."

"And what's his grouch now?" queried Henri.

"Just before daylight he raided a lodging house in the northwest on warrant of suspicion; found plenty of tracks, but no feet in them. Thought he was sure to make a haul, but something or other scared the birds before he got there."

"Where was all this, did you say?" Billy was manifesting more than passing interest in the news brought by Demonet.

"Northwest," repeated the Frenchman, "near or in Charlotte Street, I believe."

The boys had a joint stroke of second awakening. "Something or other scared the birds." Was that "something or other" bred in the dizzy descent and escape of two captives and the belated discovery by one Heinrich that the cage was empty; or did the "scare" come out of an ash barrel in a dark alley?

"Here's a plain case of good for evil, when the exchange wasn't intended at all," remarked Billy, when Demonet had departed in the direction of the hangars. "If it hadn't been for us risking our necks, the jail would have been crowded this morning."

"Better ask Max, if you ever see him again," suggested Henri, "what he thinks of the 'good' we did him."

"That's the only dear memory in the whole shake-up. But"—Billy paused to weigh the idea—"if Adams had nailed Roque, what a howdy-do in Scotland Yard!"

The young aviators, having yet a large part of their holiday coin in pocket, dodged out for a hasty feed in the nearest café, after which they presented themselves before Lieutenant Morgan to announce readiness for duty, but with no intent of exploiting their vacation experience.

The directing officer was busy for the time at the telephone. Henri standing near the office table, noticed thereon the outspread pages of a Paris newspaper, and, idly glancing at the print, saw a report that one of two gigantic strokes in preparation by Germany would be aimed at Calais, as a vital strategic point.

It occurred to the boy that it might have been just such rumor which caused Ardelle to secretly travel toward some center of definite information,

and it also created in Henri anticipation of renewed activity in the way of aerial reconnaissance, or look-out work, aloft.

Seeing the lieutenant now at leisure, Billy had reported for his chum and himself, and expressed the hope that their next assignment would mostly have to do with aeroplaning.

"I had begun to believe that the secret service had beguiled you from the air paths," said the officer, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Hauled us, if you please, sir," earnestly declared Billy, "it was always a case of have to when we mixed in that business."

"I was only joking, my boy; I know how you feel about it," and the lieutenant opened the order book at his elbow. "We'll see that you are given a lucky number for the next call."

Demonet was talking about the recent engagement between British and German troops at Halluch, on the front in France, southwest of Lille, as the boys walked into the mess-room for lunch, and the veteran aviator was inclined to complain that he was in hard luck, being so near to burning gunpowder and unable to get even a whiff of it.

"But never mind, my gallants," he called across the table to Billy and Henri, "there are fine days yet to come, many a flight and many a spanking breeze to outride, with a bit of a shindy thrown in."

Another twenty-four hours passed, however, be-

fore the dawn of one of Demonet's "fine" days. Because of apparent cessation of Zeppelin raids on London, the Royal Aviation Corps could spare some members of the city patrol for work further afield, namely, coast points nearer to the western front of actual fighting and the locality where the Germans were sending up squadrons of aeroplanes to prevent the British air scouts from making military surveys.

It was a decidedly crisp morning, a north wind, and particles of sleet in the air when the Young Aeroplane Scouts were notified that they were booked to pilot Logan and Cantrell, noted for exploits with explosive and gunning material, into territory where there was something doing for aviators every waking moment. Logan's specialty, the boys learned, was fire balls, while the other mentioned air sailor had the name of the best marksman at flying targets in the Corps.

While Billy and Henri were getting into fleeced-lined jackets and heavy felt shoes, provided from the station stores, Demonet came around to assure them that they were hitched up with a couple who never dodged danger, assuming, as a matter of course, this would be eminently pleasing information to the lads.

As in the former journey, with Ardelle in the seaplane, Dover was to be the first stop after leaving London, and the starting point of the final dash

upcoast. Billy paired with Logan and Henri guided the biplane with Cantrell in the observer's seat. Landing in Dover, the boys, chilled through and through, were given the grateful opportunity of thawing out before the fire in that familiar inn under the hill.

"If we don't get plugged by some high-shooting cannon on this trip I'm thinking there is a show for us to see Calais under fire." Henri then went on to relate what he had read in the Paris papers.

"Don't count too much on that kind of talk," sagely remarked Billy, referring to the report of contemplated German attack. "We may, though, drop into the old town once more, after the war, and take tea with that friend of yours, the big boss who sent us safe to Paris once-upon-a-time."

Two days later the young aviators were again close to the great war game on French soil, with all the sensations and reminders of former experience crowding upon them.

Billy was the first to get re-baptism as participant in a particularly brilliant and difficult feat, planned and executed by the intrepid Logan—the destruction of a German captive balloon, of the type known as "sausage," by means of which the Teutons had been enabled to obtain valuable information regarding the movements of opposing troops.

Logan had great confidence, through continued experiment, in the efficacy and explosive power of

the fire balls he had brought in a wadded box from London, and he determined by their use to get rid of the gas bag that was working ill to the cause he served.

"You've been through some nerve-racking events, I understand," he said to Billy, late one afternoon, "so I guess you're seasoned enough to hold steady if things got a little bit lurid. Eh?"

"If I get scared, I'll keep it to myself," replied the Bangor boy with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well," continued Logan, with an uplift of the hands, "if you make a balk at the wheel it will be like a doctor's mistake—no come-back."

When the aviators stepped into the biplane, which had been minutely inspected for any defect, from out the soldier circle of watchers Henri sprang forward to wring the hand of his chum, give him the good word of courage and breathe the fervent hope of safe return.

For it was a perilous mission, indeed. The captive balloon that Logan would destroy was moored fifteen miles behind the German lines, and to win near it was to write red in flying records.

The young pilot had directions to send the biplane skyward right from the go, and when he steadied the machine for directly forward movement the clouds billowed about and were punctured by the onrush.

The aeroplanes guarding the balloon were so vigi-

lant that the attacking aviators had to try four times before they could rise above it. Logan kept up a rapid flow of advice and encouragement, but Billy, following instructions to the letter, had given no sign of trepidation. His steering maneuvers were wonderfully executed, and when, in the fourth and successful attempt to get the rise on the aerial guards, he heard the shouted command from behind, the biplane swooped down in a giddy flight from a height of 9,000 feet.

The observer, tensely alert, then placed his missiles accurately before the balloon could be hauled down, and for the dropping of these fire bombs the biplane came near enough to the earth to be in full range of the German anti-aircraft guns. Logan, seeing the crumpling and blazing fabric of the balloon, shouted for ascent, which the pilot accomplished safely, escaping from a perfect hurricane of bursting shrapnel.

When the biplane settled again within the British lines, the storm of air-rending gunnery was succeeded by cheering salvos, honoring the return of the valiant Logan and the brave boy pilot.

Henri, who had been on the nerve-rack during the absence of his chum on a mission over which there was so much grave shaking of heads, was in a fever of delight at sight of Billy, erect, smiling, and as sound as an Uncle Sam dollar.

"The finest thing I know," cried the Trouville

lad, "to see you all right and without a scratch. Some of the fellows 'round here said it would be a surprise if Logan and you ever came back from a venture that had all the odds against it."

"It was something of a shaky proposition, as I soon found out," admitted Billy, "but, geeminy, pal, there's something about a thing like that which makes the blood hum, and danger is clean forgotten."

"How well we know it, that feeling," replied Henri, "for we've had it often enough. I suppose I'll have a turn next, as Cantrell hasn't done a thing nearly all day but tinker with the machine gun in our aeroplane."

The "turn," when it came, proved an air duel that matched for thrilling features the Logan performance in which Billy had mixed and achieved renown.

CHAPTER XIX.

HENRI HAS A LIVELY TURN.

WHEN Cantrell was off duty he was a man of very few words, but with any prospect of trouble this aviator immediately became a "hail fellow well met," as the saying goes, and when he approached Henri with the jocose remark that he believed "a breath of the sea would relieve an ache in the back of his neck," the boy, knowing the habit of the speaker, instantly put it down in his own mind that the famous marksman was figuring on an aerial hunt for some hostile flyer with whom to engage in a shooting match.

That was exactly the intention the veteran airman had "up his sleeve," and that he purposed to go scouting without further delay was evidenced by prompt instruction to Henri to "tune up the old machine, and be quick about it."

The Trouville lad was not long in putting the biplane in perfect trim, and the craft, being one of the latest model, it could be relied upon to do seventy or eighty miles an hour, if pushed to the limit,

even though weighted with armor and a machine gun.

"You do the driving, and I'll do the rest, if there is any rest to do," said Cantrell, when the starting hour was fixed and near at hand.

Billy, of course, was present at the getaway, and having his anxious time at the departure of his chum on unknown adventure. Separation of these boys was always like tooth pulling to both of them.

By last order, the dash of the biplane was seaward, and why this direction, the pilot was not advised.

So swift the progress of the biplane, it seemed a very little time before Henri was looking out through the rigging at a far and wide stretch of water, and at the moment absolutely clear of sail or funnel.

Cantrell had been using his eyes through field glasses ever since the aircraft made its start, but it was not until the North Sea drew within range of vision that the eager viewer saw anything above ground which had the appearance of an enemy flying machine.

Now the observer called to the pilot to change the course to the right and directly north, and so shifted, the craft followed the coast line as straight as an arrow.

What Cantrell had seen through the glasses was showing to the eyes of Henri—an aeroplane with

markings of black and white on its wings. It was a German war bird, and the young pilot, prompted by voice to the rear, made for it in all haste. Seeing itself discovered, the enemy's machine turned about and headed toward the sea.

"Now for it!" The observer crouched behind the machine gun, in readiness for combat, and Henri took a brace at the wheel.

The two machines were soon engaged high above the sea, each using machine guns.

The British biplane flew straight for a hundred yards, and then dropped thirty or forty yards under the German aeroplane, the first named so manipulated that the speed conformed to that of the enemy.

Cantrell had prepared to fire on his adversary, when bullets from the upper craft whizzed past the heads of the boss gunner and the Trouville lad.

The young pilot made another defensive movement, a little to the right. Just then Cantrell let go fifty cartridges.

The effect was immediate. The British biplane had just time to move out of the way, when the German machine gave a lunge. Henri was at a loss to know whether it was hit or simply making another maneuver, but this indecision lasted but a moment, when he noticed that the momentum of the hostile craft in its descent seemed to be increasing.

At this period both aeroplanes were five thousand

feet up, and the German war bird was falling yet more speedily, until finally it dropped into the sea.

The weather being clear, the observer, through the glasses, could distinguish the stricken plane, and the oil from its motor spreading over the surface of the water made a large spot on the immense field of blue.

While circling above the victim of expert gunnery, the British craft was over, but just beyond reach of enemy shrapnel fire, which seemed not at all to disturb Cantrell. It was not until he was thoroughly satisfied that there was no more fight in his late aerial adversary that he ordered Henri to take the back track.

When alighting in friendly territory the boy scout was for the first time aware that the man behind him had stopped one of the German bullets with his shoulder, and that the whole front of Cantrell's jacket was soaked with blood.

"A mere scratch," insisted the gunner, when Henri hastened to give him aid in getting out of the machine. This assertion, however, was of faint utterance, and the boy was quick to summon aid. The surgeon found the bullet, and so close to the spine that another inch would have deprived the service of a crackajack airman. As it was, Cantrell had a lay-up in prospect.

"He didn't say a word when he got that jolt; but just pumped lead in a perfect stream," Henri told

172 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

Billy after the gallant comrade had been carried away to the field hospital.

"You had your luck with you to come out whole," declared the Bangor lad, when he heard the story of the fight.

"If I recollect rightly," replied Henri, "there was a time or two when they pinged pretty close to me."

With Cantrell out of the game for the time being, and Logan engaged with some ammunition tests, the boys knocked around, in and out of the trenches, with little or nothing to do.

Owing to the nationality of Henri, the young aviators struck up quite an acquaintance with French soldiers in the vicinity, and very often, when the morning coffee was served to this contingent, brought to the men in canvas buckets, the boys were invited to partake of the excellent beverage, sugared but without milk, and also of the French bread, as good as the best, which is baked in loaves like a small millstone. Of the latter, it might be mentioned, before being served the crust is carefully cut away, because in transportation and handling a certain amount of dirt is bound to gather there.

And sometimes the boys would sit with these soldiers of the republic at the two solid meals of the day, dinner and supper, when appeared the two great staple dishes—ragout and pot-au-feu, the first made generally of stewed mutton, highly sea-

soned, and the second, boiled beef and soup, with a mixture of vegetables, having always a plentiful basis of potatoes.

The cook's tent was a point of fascination for the young aviators, and this attraction was largely shared, for the operation of carving meat is generally a matter of much interest to soldiers who happen to be off duty. They gather in the vicinity of the cook's tent or hut and admire or criticize the skill with which he undertakes the cutting and trimming of the great pieces of beef or mutton in raw state and just from the hoof.

Billy and Henri soon discovered that the army chef was a mighty good fellow, and an old campaigner who had traveled and fought over considerable of the same territory traversed by the lads in their early war experience. Vardon was his name, and not very astray in his case was the current remark in France that the cook is the bravest man in the regiment, and generally a tribute to the danger he sometimes has to undergo to carry special dishes to the gallants who await his coming at the very apex of the battle line.

Vardon was greatly enthused over the aerial achievements with which his young friends had been identified during the preceding few days, and insisted upon their going over and over again the details of the thrilling adventures.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "if my two little boys in

Lille could hear you tell this, how wide their eyes would open."

"Lille? Why that's the town Ardelle headed for," said Billy, in side remark to his chum. "The Germans control it now."

Vardon caught the last sentence. "Not for long," he maintained in vigorous French, "it is the grand drive they'll get before the spring."

The chef had lodged an idea in the minds of the boys, of tendency to develop some harum-scarum project with a whole lot of close calls thrown in.

The question-putting turned the other way, and the cook was giving back information about the French fortress and manufacturing city of the department of the Nord in exchange for the aeroplaning incidents he had so eagerly absorbed. He was hugely gratified by the interest the lads were taking in the home locality from which he was exiled as the result of hostile invasion.

"You shall see it one day, dear friends, with me," proclaimed Vardon, waving the carving knife over his head in tune with his thought of the happy prospect.

As the young aviators were returning to the troop center where they belonged, Billy voiced a desire that was in accord with the run of a plan, which curiously enough was working the same in the mind of his pal. "If they'd only let us have a go just by ourselves, I'd like it mighty well."

"Now you've said it," added Henri, "I've been wishing that for a week."

"Maybe we could induce Logan to nominate us for a ride to Lille, to see how things look from the skyside," suggested the Bangor boy.

"Doubt it," replied the Trouville lad, "but we might make a try."

When the proposition was submitted to the fire-bomb artist, he was not impressed with the argument of the youngsters. "That's a good way from this base," he observed, "and it's more than a guess that you would be shot to pieces from above or below. Besides, you don't know the lay of the land."

"Yes we do," promptly asserted Billy. "Vardon gave us the straight tip on that part of it."

"May I ask who is this Vardon?"

"He's the boss cook for the French fellows over there," put in Henri, pointing the direction.

"A good cook is not always an expert on geography," laughed Logan.

"But he lived in Lille," volunteered Billy, as a clincher, "and knows the way in and out like a book. And, say, Mr. Logan," the boy leaning toward the veteran to emphasize the final effort to convince, "we know a man somewhere in Lille who might send back some live news if we could run across him."

"There would be some 'dead' news come back to

176 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

us if you attempted to land a British aeroplane in that territory," was Logan's conclusion. "The best way to make that sort of an excursion would be in a cart." This last was intended for humor, but Billy, grown a bit huffy in disappointment, muttered as he moved away, "let it be a cart then." Down in his heart he felt the denial of the proposed jaunt had been perfectly reasonable, yet sometimes discipline did not agree with him. As Sergeant Scott used to say, "you boys need a lot of watching."

It so happened that following the conversation with Logan, the boys noticed that a slaughter of livestock for food supply was going on near the French lines, and typical French economy in evidence, use made of every possible fragment of each carcass. The hide, bones and uneatable portions were being carefully collected, as the boys reached the scene of operation, to be sent back to the base to be otherwise turned to advantage. This transportation was by carts.

"There's our excursion boat," said Billy, as one of the two-wheeled vehicles slowly rumbled by, with only the driver perched on a shaft seat directly behind the horse. The contents of the cart was under cover of a heavy piece of canvas, and upon this the boys found easy resting after a running jump over the tail-board of the vehicle. The fellow holding the reins paid no attention to this addition to the

load. He did not know one of the regular helpers from another, so numerous were they.

After jolting over an improvised military road for several hours, and seeing an open country that invited a hike, the boys quietly dropped out of the cart, to enjoy the privilege or suffer the consequence of being free agents in, to them, an unknown section, where everybody had to, sometime or other, give strict account of himself.

And Lille was fifty miles away!

CHAPTER XX.

THROUGH FLOOD AND FIRE.

"WELL, Buddy, is it strike out or strike back?" Henri was not quite sure then just what he wanted to do. Under spell of impulse the boys had proceeded to the limit line—one way or the other. It was not too late to hustle back to the starting point, and so save a breach of discipline, and there was no bar at present to prevent exploration of the landscape beyond.

"As long as we've made the break," said Billy, "I'm for putting it through. We're not enlisted in the ranks, and there's no string to us."

"But hasn't it occurred to you that the very fact of not being labeled regular soldiers makes it a pretty sure thing that if we are picked up by the fellows in gray our next performance will be acting as targets for a line of sharpshooters?"

"It won't be the first time, Henri, old boy, that we've been captured without credentials, and are we not alive and kicking?" It was quite evident that the Bangor boy had made up his mind to take the chances as they might come.

"Open trail it is, then," agreed Henri, no longer inclined to debate that which he was really more than half willing to accept.

Billy consulted his pocket compass, and the boys set their steps northeast, with never a look behind them. The walking was fairly good, and the first five miles seemed no task at all in the covering. Then they came to fields that had been ripped up by shells, and later to a sheltered valley in which several farm houses had been spared by the leaden hail. Here for the first time since they had jumped out of the butcher's cart, the boys saw signs of human life, an old peasant and two youngsters loading a hay-wagon with shock upon shock of fodder.

Henri hailed the workers in French, causing the trio to face about with pitchforks presented in defensive attitude, but as quickly lowered when the young birdmen came forward with friendly word and gesture, and showing that they were unarmed.

"So many of the rough have been this way," faltered the old man, "that we are in much worry for fear that they find our two horses that are left. But this day we are going north to sell the fodder to one grand officer, who say 'come and no harm for thee!'"

"Here's where we shine!" exclaimed Billy, in English, turning to his chum. "The venerable will have four sons instead of two. A couple of smock-frocks, cowhide shoes, muss your hair, and we'll

pass all right. You're a dandy speaker of the *patois*, and I guess I can raise enough of the dialect to fool 'em."

Very thankful, indeed, were the boys that they could finger, deep in pocket, some of the hard money that they did not spend on that exciting holiday in London.

The aged farmer and his boys were more than willing to trade even with the young aviators, when an exchange of garments was suggested, quite a collection of old clothes produced by the housewife, who came out of the dwelling to find out what was going on. But at the proposal of Billy and Henri to join the fodder-selling expedition as members of the family, there was instant objection. The old man had begun to think he was dealing with a pair of spies, and being found in such company was not a healthy prospect in case of investigation.

Here the magic of the silver pieces operated to convince the head of the family (the woman) that the owners of the coin were just two orphans far from home and seeking a long lost friend in Lille.

When the horses, a sorry team, were brought out of hiding, when the top-load was secured by ropes to the rack, and a number of vegetable baskets swung underneath, it would have required a practiced eye to select from the sons of the soil mounting the vehicle the two who did not belong there.

"We'll show Ardelle a make-up trick or two,"

complacently observed Billy, getting a good grip on the binding rope to keep from being jolted off his lofty perch on the wagon.

The first day out, and twenty miles nearer Lille.

"Say, pal," suddenly called out Billy, while the little company of travelers rested at the roadside, and the horses, freed of their harness, were browsing in the open nearby, "do you know it's December twenty-third?" The speaker had awakened to the mentioned date by long delayed inspection of a vest-pocket record he had been keeping of recent events.

"Well, we must have been up in the clouds to get that near Christmas without knowing it. Doesn't seem any time since December began." Henri was thinking that war must have warped his memory or somehow damaged his ability to count.

"Let me see," went on the Bangor boy reflectively, "our first Christmas among these fighting nations was within sound of stormy Helgoland waters, and you'll remember it was none other than Ardelle in one of his mystery stunts who added a thrilling moment to the occasion. Wouldn't it be funny if we should meet him again on the anniversary in the same old act?"

"It would be rather a curious thing," admitted Henri, "but strange happenings are common in this neck of the woods."

When the wagon got under way again the next morning, about daylight, the driver frequently prod-

ded the shambling nags to greater speed, for in the south threatening clouds were brooding, and bad weather of easy prediction.

Somewhere in the dim distance could be heard the booming of heavy guns. Surely no truce had been declared in advance of the day that stood for peace and good will. Still further on the route the artillery fire expanded in sound like the long roll of thunder, while the travelers cowered under intermittent and tremendously heavy downpours of rain.

Deeper and deeper sank the wheels of the heavily loaded wagon into the growing sea of mud, and the jaded horses floundered in the clay wash with every feeble response to the vigorously applied whip-lash. Then there was the full and final stop. The whole outfit was hopelessly mired.

And Lille was twelve miles distant.

The peasants were not interested in this latter measure of miles—Lille was not their goal, and the turn had been near that would have brought them within the hour to the trenches over which the Tricolor waved.

But Billy and Henri had fixed their destination, and if they could possibly get through the lines of gray, no quitting was attached to their plan.

“‘My kingdom for a horse!’” recited the Bangor boy, with comical effect, for by present appearance he was a long way from the king row—mud-bespattered, drenched and dripping, and his ill-fit-

ting, outlandish garments hanging on him in scarecrow style.

Henri, equally dilapidated, ankle deep in slush, could not help laughing until he shook all over at the ludicrous attitude of his chum.

The peasants looked on in stolid wonder at the comedy display, having lost heart with misspent efforts to lift the wagon wheels out of the mire.

About a quarter of a mile east of the scene of stranding in the sunken road there was a ground rise that promised opportunity of seeing what was going on 'round about, and the boys decided to seek the elevation in preference to standing idle alongside the mud-locked vehicle.

Splashing through the intervening puddles, the chums soon gained more solid footing, and reached the lookout point. Though the rain had ceased to fall in sheets and torrents, the country, within range of vision, had been so flooded that it seemed to be floating. Along the distant battle front the glare of exploding shells was occasionally visible, but smoke mixed with mist to conceal the location of the immense guns that were booming with almost every passing minute.

"The venerable said awhile ago that the big town was not more than a dozen miles north of here," said Billy, after silent contemplation of the gloomy panorama. "We ought to be able to foot it in all the time we've got before night. Hardly a doubt,

either, but that our kind, or the kind that we look like, could wander in just now without exciting suspicion."

"No protest from me, Buddy," stated Henri. "The sooner we move along the better."

"Bide a bit," remarked Billy, speaking as though a new thought had come to him. Looking in the direction of their splashing route from the road, and noting the two peasant lads leading the horses up from the low ground, the young birdman sent out a shrill pipe from a whistling contrivance of two fingers inserted in the corners of his mouth, following this signal by arm movement inviting approach.

"Let's meet them half-way," he then suggested to his chum.

"What's the idea?" questioned Henri, as the pair walked down the hill.

"Give me a couple of those shillings you are carrying," was the extent of Billy's reply. He had in hand a similar amount of his own little store of cash. Henri complied with the request.

When the four youths came together, the Bangor boy reached for and deposited in the toil-hardened hands of the peasants the gift of coin. "We wish you a merry Christmas!" he exclaimed. "Good-bye and good luck."

This ceremony concluded, the Young Aeroplane Scouts struck out for the north.

"Just had to do it," explained Billy, as he hiked ahead. "Those kids may not be any merrier to-morrow than they are to-day, but I haven't had a chance to say it in the old way for so long that I couldn't resist the inspiration."

"You're all right, Buddy," declared Henri, slapping his comrade between the shoulders.

With the end of sentiment the more serious part of the undertaking began. The boys looked their parts, and could act them if occasion demanded, but there was always the chance of a slip or betraying circumstance—and such error could hardly have other than sinister result in the custom of military rule.

But the Christmas spirit served well in getting the boys through, and though here and there Christmas trees were blown out of the trenches by explosive forces, and soldiers sent running helter-skelter, the observance of the occasion went happily on all along the line, from the most advanced trenches to the communication points in the rear. Christmas trees blazed almost as if in opposition to the flare of exploding shells.

In the light of it all, two bedraggled peasant lads slipped into town without hindrance or question. In Billy's notebook was an address that he felt would provide a temporary refuge—the home of Vardon, the chef, the home of "those two little boys."

He determined, however, to use all precaution

in seeking the house of his friend, that no harm should come to those within through receiving guests who might later be marked as suspects.

Again the assurance of holiday making that suspicion was not in the forefront just then—the assurance that three thousand soldiers were listening to a peace sermon in the cathedral of St. Maurice, notwithstanding the ceaseless roar of artillery; that lighted, decorated Christmas trees peeped from the windows of private houses, large ones standing in the railway station, in the restaurants and in the Red Cross trains.

And so the weary wayfarers went in the night to the only place they knew in this city of a quarter of a million inhabitants.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN MASKS FELL OFF.

A LITTLE brown cottage, a bit of garden, and a good old custom of burning the Yuletide candle in the front window represented that night the home of which Vardon dreamed and longed for.

An urchin of the streets had given Billy and Henri the exact information they needed to verify the written address, and in return the aforesaid urchin was delighted at the receipt of a franc, which the Bangor boy had treasured as a pocketpiece since his first flying visit to Paris. He knew better than to distribute English coin in Lille.

Henri was softly knocking at the cottage door while his chum produced the silver tip for their guide. A patter of bare feet and a burst of childish merriment greeted the ears of the lad giving the knuckle tap. A gentle voice was heard, bidding "hush, 'tis not Kris Kringle yet, my babes." Then the door swung open, and the beaming face of a most motherly being held the eyes of the young aviators.

In French, polite and kindly, they were asked their errand, and in the same language Henri advised of their acquaintance with the one man in the world to this household. That was enough—news from “daddy”—what matter who brought the word?

Chairs were drawn close to the big porcelain stove in a kitchen, where chalk would have marked dark, so white was the floor; grandpa was shaken from a comfortable nap in a roomy arm-chair, the family cat got a push out of the way at the point of a neatly slippered foot, and two curly-headed, rosy-cheeked images of the champion carver shyly paraded in nightgowns for the admiration of the strangers.

“Gee,” murmured Billy, “I wish I had a piece of money that didn’t have a picture of the king on it. I saw a toy store ’round the corner that needs me.”

A fine courtesy that put hospitality before questions also put a lot of wholesome food where it would do the most good to a pair of half-famished lads. By the time the boys had told all they knew, and some more, about that most interesting man, Vardon, Billy had a sleeping child pillowed against both sides of his collar-bone.

There was a downy bed for the tired travelers in the cottage loft, plenty of hot water in tin foot-tubs, and a kindly bid to “make yourselves comfortable.”

Billy attempted to tell Madame Vardon that he

hoped that the presence of his chum and himself would not serve to draw unwelcome attention from the military authorities. But he was interrupted by the hostess, who laughingly said:

"La, la, monsieur, may not one whose life is always here entertain on Christmas nephews from that little farm across the valley? Peace to you."

And so it came about that the Young Aeroplane Scouts slept like logs and had Christmas day awakening in Lille.

"Now that we are in, how long before we'll be wishing we were out?" Henri dreamily asked, blinking at the daylight penetrating the diamond-shaped dots in one of the tiny windows of the loft.

"Put it the other way once," said Billy; "when we're out will we wish we were in? What we need is time to frame up good reason for quitting the colors on the quiet."

"But there was nothing doing to hold us. As you said, we're not enlisted——"

"Save the argument for Logan, if you ever see him again," broke in Billy rolling over for another little snooze.

Very soon, however, the lads were routed from the covers by a cheery call from below, and they found that in the night somebody had carefully dried and ironed their damp clothing, even put a polish on their rusty shoes, and all in a neat pile at the bedside, with some clean linen on top.

"This is sure the glad hand we're getting," observed Billy, "but it goes against the grain to think of that good lady shining these brogans."

On the floor below, the boys, on the way to the breakfast table, brushed against a little Christmas tree laden with tinsel and sweets, reminding them once more of the Day, and also causing a sigh of regret that they could not contribute to the pleasure store of the romping and joyous children.

The notion was growing with Billy and Henri all the time that it would be about the best thing that could happen if they might actually find Ardelle and so make their harum-scarum adventure really worth while. It appeared, though, as if the notion had nothing upon which to hang, until a casual remark by Madame Vardon straightened two listeners in their chairs—sitting up and taking notice!

"I am not the only one who has relatives in from the country," she observed with a smile. "Monsieur Colomme, who makes the little statues of plaster, was of much happiness when the Uncle Ansel came, and we know not how—the same, maybe as you, my nephews."

"Huh!" Billy dropped a spoonful of sugar on the way to the coffee cup. "What sort of a looker is the uncle?"

"Oh, quite so old as this"—the woman bent her shoulders, and using a fork in illustration of stump-

ing with a cane, impressed the fact that she was talking about somebody far gone in years.

"About how far from here does the plaster of paris sculptor live?" Henri was gaining interest.

"In the avenue not so very far away. But of Monsieur Colomme what could you want?"

"Perhaps, Madame Vardon," replied the Trouville lad, "we might find something to do in the way of carrying a tray of the statues around town and making an honest penny now and then."

"Beautiful!" exclaimed the hostess. "He does give the work you speak about. We will go and see him this very day."

Henri turned a lowered eyelid upon Billy.

When Madame Vardon and her "nephews" left the cottage to visit the home of Monsieur Colomme she entrusted to the care of the boys, by their insistence that they should do all the burden bearing on this trip, a well-filled basket of eatables.

"All of my neighbors are not so fortunate as I," she said. "Vardon had a good business, and we were saving before the war; so I have something to spare now and then. I'll go around and see Granny Mentone while you are talking to Monsieur Colomme."

When Billy and Henri got their chance of sizing up the "sculptor" they were convinced in about a minute that he was not more than half adapted to the business he pretended to carry on. Too much

192 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

fire in the eye of this Frenchman, to be pottering with plaster casts without cause in the thick of fighting operations, and the boys had grown wise to the ways of adroit deception. Otherwise, they might have taken the image peddler for what he was not.

"The young men have come, Monsieur," prattled Madame Vardon, "to seek what places you may have to give in your selling. They would speak with you about it."

"You can recommend them, Madame?" gravely questioned the image dealer.

"La, la, and of course I can, two fine lads of whom their mother was proud. Try them, Monsieur, try them." With this Madame Vardon adjusted her flowered bonnet and departed on her errand of charity.

The boys felt sheepish when they alone and in silence faced the gimlet glance of the man expected to give them employment. That their own bluff was uncovered they were quite as sure now as they had been that they had correctly surmised pretense in the person behind the steely look fixed upon them.

What they would have said next, Billy and Henri could never tell, but this was of no consequence, for every mask fell off when a familiar voice hailed the lads from the doorway of a room at the rear of the shop.

"It has rained miracles as well as water, or my

eyes deceive me. Or is it Kris Kringle who showered these gifts?"

The make-up was about the same as at farewell on Dunkirk wharves, and inside the make-up the same creative genius—Ardelle!

Colomme instantly faded in importance—the boys were grabbing the hands of the big boss they could bank on at every stage of the game.

The supposed plaster moulder growled remonstrance. "Why the de'il" (addressing the boys), "didn't you give it to me straight at the start?"

"For the same reason that you showed us a false front," pertly parried Billy. "How could we know just how to take you? Besides, Madame Vardon did all the talking."

"That she did," grimly admitted Colomme, "but she's the right good sort, heart and soul for our land and cause."

"One of the main reasons therefor," volunteered Henri, "was waving a carving knife at our last view."

Ardelle and the boys withdrew to the back room, and the young aviators told in detail how they happened to break into Lille.

"I suppose I ought to feel greatly complimented that you had me in mind when you took the chances you did to get here. Let me now return the favor by saying that you have done to-day what the keen-

est enemy blades have failed to accomplish—found me in Lille, and by a clue as slender as a needle.”

“It’s up to you, then, to square us with the fellows we left behind.” Henri had already begun to figure on a return journey.

“No sooner discovered, I see, I am to be bereaved by desertion,” laughed the French agent.

“Not that way, sir,” cried the Trouville lad, earnestly hedging; “we’ll stick if you say so.”

“There, there, my lad, I was only joking,” continued Ardelle, pinching Henri’s ear; “it wouldn’t do at all, and, again, do you want to get the London Sky Patrol down on me forever? No, you two must be gotten out of here, and I think I can conjure up a way.”

“From what I have learned in the past about your think-tank,” remarked Billy, “I feel that we might as well phone now for the baggage wagon.”

“Flatterer,” chided Ardelle; “remember, though, it may be impossible to make it safely by any ordinary means.”

“But we got in,” insisted Henri.

“I told you that it must have rained miracles when I saw you,” bantered the chief.

“Maybe there is an aeroplane hitched in the back yard,” suggested Billy.

The conversation there halted that the talkers might listen to Colomme out in front telling Ma-

dame Vardon that he had already put the boys to work.

"La, la," she was heard to reply, "that is so grand, but tell them to get home in time for supper."

"The word 'home' sounds good to me," commented Billy, rather sadly.

Ardelle had lost himself in reflection, with look inscrutable. Was he picturing a wonderful way to waft his young friends through space and turmoil and win them safe journey?

Planned then or later, this escape was strangely brought about.

CHAPTER XXII.

ESCAPED IN STRANGE CRAFT.

ARDELLE directed the boys to return to the home of Madame Vardon, and there await word from him, but on no account to mention any previous acquaintance with "Uncle Ansel."

"The very walls have ears, remember," advised the French agent, "and a still tongue serves well a situation like we are in."

In passing through and out of the shop, Billy could not refrain from bestowing a wink and a twist of the mouth upon Colomme, who mocked in return by a low bow.

Reporting to their much interested hostess that the prospect of benefit resulting from their talk with the plaster art dealer was all to the good, the young aviators went no further in detail.

"It is not for the earning I am anxious," earnestly assured the kindly matron, "but you are so much safer with something to do, and will not have to stay cooped up to keep away from inquiry. You are welcome to what is here, and as long as you like."

"We do not expect to trouble you, Madame, much longer," said Billy.

"La, la, trouble is not the word for friends of my Jean," warmly declared Madame Vardon. "Do not speak it again, please."

Not this nor many more words were the boys to voice in the little cottage home that had sheltered them in their hour of need. Even farewell was denied by the manner of their going.

It was just after supper, when Madame Vardon, answering a knock at the door, informed the boys that a messenger from the shop of Monsieur Colomme was waiting to escort them there for instructions as to the morrow, when their service as salesmen was to begin. Obedient to the advice of Ardelle, Billy and Henri gave no sign of their belief that this summons meant the finish of their visit in the Vardon home.

The waiting messenger wore a thickly-grown beard and was muffled to the ears in a shaggy overcoat. Without a word he set a lively pace for the boys through the then deserted streets. The trio had proceeded some distance before the young aviators realized that either the location of the Colomme shop had changed within a few hours or that they were being guided astray.

"Say, captain," reminded Billy, "ain't you a little off the route? This isn't the way we went last."

The guide merely grunted, and in no manner for understanding.

The boys stopped their stride, determined to go no further until there was better explanation of this deviation from the right road.

Then the bearded leader turned and laughingly remarked: "'Tis a pity when your near friends question your faith."

"Gee, if he hasn't fooled us again!" exclaimed Billy.

"As easy as rolling off a log," added Henri.

The guide was Ardelle.

No more argument of necessity, the three hurried along, with many twists and turns, and ever away from the avenues where challenge was likely.

In the factory district, while none the less wary, Ardelle moved with more assurance and certainty in fixing a straight course, and as though he were drawing nigh to the end of the stealthy excursion.

In the deep shadow of a huge building, covering at least a half acre of ground, the French agent paused for an instant. Then, suddenly, the boys felt a grip on their wrists, and with equal quickness they were drawn through a door which opened without sound and closed as noiselessly behind them.

Ardelle produced a bull's-eye flare from one of the pockets of his voluminous overcoat, and by its flash the young aviators could see the outlines of many large pieces of machinery, countless belts and pul-

leys, but giving the impression that the industry by which they were used had not for some time been in active operation.

Carefully picking a path between the lines of mighty mechanism, stilled now and of forbidding array in the half-light of the little lantern, the leader and his followers tracked through the dust of the stone floor to a point near the elevator shaft, where was located the footway to the floors above. After a steady ascent, and from landing to landing, in several minutes the climbers had reached the immense storeroom directly under the roof. Here could be seen, as the tiny glow of the bull's-eye danced among the shadows, piles of sacks, made to contain the product of the mill in its former days of activity.

It was also evident that a few of the mentioned bags had of late been in use for another purpose, that of bedding, and Ardelle pointed to the improvised nests, with the jocular remark that "you don't have to show cash or baggage in advance to get a bed in this hotel."

"Will you kindly tell us, chief, if you expect to ship us out of Lille in sacks?" Billy was on edge to find out what scheme the French agent had devised for the getaway of Henri and himself.

"You boys are much too lively to figure as dead-weight," replied Ardelle with a grin. "Be patient,

my lad, and maybe you'll get an eye-opener in the morning."

"That's a fine way," complained Henri, "to hold a fellow in suspense like that and expect him to rest easy."

"You'll have a partner in that, my boy," promptly asserted the chief, "for I will have no easy rest until I get you started away from here. The fact is, I am going myself soon, but not in the same direction that you may travel."

"Write to us and we'll join you at any time," laughed Billy.

"Rely upon it," announced Ardelle, with due emphasis, "you will get no scent of my trail at present. I am not moving in aeroplanes on this trip."

"Who was it then, when we had a regular job in London, that pulled us into the secret service?" The Bangor boy was somewhat nettled in his view of the chief's attitude.

Ardelle gave Billy a reproachful glance. "Don't make the mistake of believing that I undervalue your services, and know that I called you only because of high estimate of your ability and courage. Then we all had a fighting chance. Now there is only the constant menace of the death that nobody would care to die, without glory or precious memory—the end of a rat in a trap."

"Forgive me, chief," pleaded Billy, overcome by regret that he had spoken as he did. "I did not

mean what I said, or, rather, I did not understand what I was saying."

"Call it square, my boy," said Ardelle, with the old smile again in his eyes.

During this talk the three had been seated on cushions of sacks, and all they had to do when retiring for the night was just to lie back on the pile and sleep comfortably after the chief had shut off the light in the bull's-eye.

All dreams were short-circuited, however, in the hour of dawn. When the boys got their awakening shake, they saw that Ardelle had hoisted a ladder to the frame of the skylight.

"That means a walk in the roof-garden," was Billy's aside to his chum.

"It means something else than a joke, I'm sure," was Henri's sober reply.

The chief had his shoulders in heaving position under the big lid above, and it lifted readily enough to indicate that it had been opened more than once in the recent past.

"It is sure some top," Billy immediately remarked when he got his head through the aperture.

So long and wide this flat surface that a regiment of soldiers could have drilled upon it, with space to spare.

"Don't move about," said Ardelle, "you can never tell where prying eyes may be peering through field glasses."

The French agent, however, was doing something to the contrary at the very moment, and a very curious proceeding, indeed. From a bundle he had brought up with him he took a roll of white cloth, which, outspread upon the roof, proved to be a good-sized bed-sheet. Having laid the snowy square on the dark red surface, a decided contrast, the man of mystery rejoined his young companions, who had sought back rest against the base of a tall chimney.

"I see now, boss," declared Billy, nudging Henri with his elbow, "it is a magic carpet on which we are to be transported. Aladdin is himself again."

"The Arabian Nights,' my son," quickly remarked the chief, "lack some of the wonders of the century in which you live. This much I hope to prove if the morning continues clear."

It must be confessed that the young aviators were more or less disturbed by an unbidden suspicion that their tried and true friend had slipped a cog somewhere in his mental apparatus, and devoted the passing minutes to furtive inspection of the object of this anxious distrust.

But Ardelle well survived this amateur inquisition, as calm and cool as ever he was, and without a trace of nerve strain or wild-eyed inclination to bite anybody.

The morning continued clear, fulfilling the main

condition tending to the success of the strange experiment.

The sun was hardly an hour high when somewhere and apparently far away in the overhead a faint buzzing was audible to the trio resting at the foot of the tall chimney surmounting the abandoned mill building.

Billy and Henri were instantly aroused from lazy reflection. To them the sound was like the call of the key to a telegrapher.

"An aeroplane!" exclaimed the Bangor boy.

"Or the ghost of one," put in the Trouville lad.

Though the beehive vibration was growing more and more distinct to the hearing, not a speck or spot was showing anywhere in the blue canopy above.

Ardelle seemed not at all concerned in the supposed hovering mystery that his companions had conceived. About the only move he made during the listening period was the placing of a loose brick on a corner of the outspread sheet, which rising wind had begun to lift.

Then a new thought bounced into Billy's mind. The spread of white cloth was a signal, and, necessarily, to something or somebody aloft!

The hum and whir continued in the sky region, drawing nearer and nearer. Yet no sight of the producing power.

Then a blur, and motor whiz close at hand, a fall-

ing shape that took on form—then a big battleplane swept and rolled upon the expansive surface of the roof.

For the first time in their professional career as aviators, the boys viewed that new marvel of mechanical bird life—the French invisible aeroplane!

To Billy and Henri all blank was the immediate past in the material presence of this wonder craft. The body and framework were constructed, as in most of the planes the boys had been accustomed to operating abroad, of aluminum braced with wire, but over the framework of this advanced model, instead of canvas, was stretched a transparent material looking like mica or celluloid, or a mixture of both.

Amazement ceased with Henri as to why the oncoming plane had been heard and not seen—absolutely lost to sight at 6,000 feet, an indistinct blur at 3,000 feet, and even closer not discerned with the same sort of tangible impression as other style flying machines.

Here was Ardelle's rare method of communication with the authorities he served. Barred by environment from the telegraph, wire or wireless, and hemmed in by hostile vigilance, science had provided a still newer way of beating the game. Science is no respecter of military secrets!

To the man at the wheel of the invisible machine, who did not change his position during the brief

stop, Ardelle handed an envelope closed with red seal, and further rapidly addressed the airman in French.

From what the boys could catch of the words, they knew that the plan for their escape had developed. The strange craft was to be the means of their deliverance.

A minute later the young aviators were under the wings unseeable, and with a dash forward and full flight, were borne aloft and away from Lille, leaving one lonely figure on the mill roof.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PLAYED HAVOC WITH SUPPLY TRAIN.

THE boys, huddled aft in the speeding aeroplane, now at a height of 6,000 feet, had no opportunity of putting a lot of questions they had in mind to the driver of the new-fangled machine, who, indeed, had given them scant notice from the time they came aboard as unexpected passengers. They felt, however, that the get-together spirit of aviators would finally prevail, and in time to come they would gain knowledge desired in relation to this latest triumph of construction that bid fair to revolutionize aerial warfare.

The young birdmen were also convinced that there must be something in that envelope forwarded by Ardelle which would set them straight with the military authorities they would soon encounter, and result in returning them to the command where they belonged.

In this they were not disappointed, for when the strange aircraft reached the division headquarters, from the staff officer to whom they were presented,

along with the communication of the French agent, the boys learned, without extended worry, that they were in no danger at all of facing a firing squad. Indeed, what they did face was only mild severity, partially concealing inward amusement.

The expectation, too, that the aviator who drove the machine in which they escaped from Lille would "thaw a bit" when he was advised that he had aided a pair of his own kind, was handsomely realized, and when the boys mentioned the names of Demonet, Legarde and Toureille as flying comrades, every bar of formality went down with a pleasing thump.

"What's the stuff that puts the planes out of sight?" With the hasty ripening of acquaintance, Billy, as an aeroplane builder himself, started with the query that was uppermost in his mind.

"I'm not on the inside of the manufacture," stated Gaspard, the aviator questioned, "but I believe they call it 'cellon,' a chemical combination, I'm told, of cellulose and acetic acid. As you know, it is as easy to see through as glass, and I know, by experience as a pilot, short though it has been with the new aeroplane, that it's as tough as rubber, doesn't catch fire and gasoline doesn't seem to phase it."

"It sure is a star winner for gum-shoe sailing," commented Billy, "and there'll be fewer birdmen potted by the ground guns when they make enough of the new machines to pass around."

208 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

The boys, however, were destined to do most of their lofty traveling for some time to come, in the kind of aeroplanes that can be seen as well as heard, but each had his mind made up that one day they would jointly apply for a machine of the invisible type.

Within the week the young aviators were passed down the lines to the place of their first assignment, where Logan gave them a "blowing up," and included a lecture on foolhardiness, which ill became an airman who took more risks without thought than most any other member of the flying corps. The boys, it might be mentioned, did not retaliate by referring to that reputation. They were as meek as Moses for the time being.

Among the pleasures of getting back in the fold was to find Cantrell so mended that he was thinking seriously of again going out aeroplane shooting in a few days. As for Vardon, that worthy almost threw a fit of delight when the boys told him about spending Christmas with Madame Vardon and the little Vardons.

"To think," he cried, "of your seeing Marie, and Jean and François, all at once; what joy! And the grandpère, too," he rattled on, while a huge caldron, through neglect, sent up a cloud of steam and gusher of boiling water.

The inaction of several days had its breaking point when the young aviators observed Logan and

the revived Cantrell in close conference with an officer of high degree behind the trenches. The bomb-maker was clinching some special point of argument by vigorous gesture, while the expert marksman indulged his usual habit, when some important measure was on tap, of brushing his cap with his elbow.

In a half hour afterwards, the results of this confab reacted upon the boys. "To keep you from becoming restless and again inclined to play truant," bantered Logan, "there is a little excursion being arranged by Cantrell and myself which will afford some of the diversion that you need."

With Logan talking like that, the young aviators were assured that the venture would not be lacking the prime elements of excitement.

It was not long before the four aviators were climbing into the biplanes, which in former flights had stood every test of speed and durability, and warranted fast and sure.

Logan, of course, carried his basket of bombs, which Billy and himself were particularly careful about loading. Cantrell and Henri were the first to leave the ground, the marksman having given the gun in the craft an overhauling earlier in the day.

The pilots, given the direction, burned the air from the word go, and in an hour had covered over fifty miles.

Cantrell, through the field-glasses, made a discov-

210 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

ery about this time which so excited his interest that he immediately shouted command to change the course from straight to right angle. The biplanes were maintaining an altitude of 2,000 feet, and plainly to be seen below was a railway train, a creeping streak across the level.

Both observers had used their glasses to reach the decision that the moving locomotive and cars made up a German supply train, and Cantrell's biplane, at his direction, like an eagle swooping down upon its prey, began descent at a steep angle. The way was clear and everything favoring the maneuver—to both right and left open fields, and on a narrow railroad bank the train unprotected from attack. No obstacles in front or rear; no woods, not a tree.

The flyers lowered themselves still further. Heads popped out from the car windows, but were drawn back in consternation at the sight of the dark red circle—the British war bird sign—on the wings of the biplanes.

Slowing down in a degree, the aircraft ran parallel with the train. Cantrell opened up with a sweeping broadside, and bullets plowed through the walls of the compartments. The air was rent by yells and shrieks of pain.

There were return shots from the car windows, and leaden bullets zipped through aeroplane rigging and flattened against the armored sides of the ma-

chine. But a swiftly dashing target is a poor mark for concentrated fire.

Cantrell and Henri were now flying so low and so close to the train that they could look through the windows on either side of the cars. After showering these with a formidable hail of bullets, the biplane came abreast with the locomotive. Another dose from the machine gun laid low the engine driver and his assistant, at the same time dealing mortal wounds to the engine itself. The locomotive stopped abruptly with a snorting, hissing sound as it belched forth volumes of steam. The train was "dead."

From the coaches soldiers came scampering out, and turned loose with gun-play, but, its purpose accomplished, the assailing biplane was out of range before any damage could be inflicted upon it.

Then it was that Logan, working in higher strata, and as a reserve force, having now a stationary object at which to aim, let go a rain of bombs, causing more havoc and setting the train guard to doing some quick jumping down the embankment.

The continued and continuous explosions had served to attract to the scene quite a number of battleplanes showing the black cross on white facing, the aerial emblem of Germany, and they might have made short work of the British aircraft had the latter been less alert in observation and of less speed in making retreat.

212 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

As it was, the pursuit forced the fleeing airmen to use every ounce of driving power in their aeroplanes to escape the combined attack.

"You don't happen to have a rabbit's foot in your pocket, do you?" asked Henri of Cantrell, as they grounded in safe territory. The boy remembered the favorite superstition of a former comrade, and of the luck which the latter always credited to such a possession.

"What's the joke?" was the counter query of the gunner.

"No joke about it," continued the Trouville lad, "either that or you've a charmed life. I believe it's contagious, too, or I wouldn't be talking to you this minute. Gee, man, don't you really know how fast and thick the lead came out of that train?"

"All in a day's work, my boy," was Cantrell's reply, as he walked away to exchange a word with Logan, who with Billy had just made landing nearby.

"Old pal, you got close to most of the honors this afternoon," said Billy in greeting to his chum.

"If we hadn't been going some," responded Henri, "those same 'honors,' as you call 'em, would have turned me into a sieve."

"Well, for a change," suggested the Bangor boy, "let's go over and have a 'chin' with Vardon."

"Don't mind if I do," assented Henri. "I know what's the matter with you—you're hungry."

"There are others," laughed Billy.

The boys had the wisdom of seasoned campaigners. They had a closer acquaintance with the French chef than they did with the British cook.

But a recent arrival in camp divided their interest in the savory stew in which Vardon graciously permitted them to dig with spoon and fork.

A huge battleplane was the chief center of attraction for a crowd of soldiers having their off day from the trenches—a dreadnought of the air from the new French fleet, and another exhibit of the remarkable development of military aviation in that country. The great craft was capable of carrying twelve people, and on its wings were two cannon which could throw three-inch steel projectiles. The regular crew for fighting consisted of four men and an officer.

Billy and Henri immediately recalled their experience in Russia's greatest aeroplane, the "Sikorsky," in which they had flown between two continents, with fourteen on board. Indeed, about the only thing in the way of flying machines which had of late completely stumped these boy experts was that transparent aeroplane.

Yet they were willing to concede that the airship at which they were now looking had the markings of "some boat."

On being apprised that Billy and Henri were identified with the Royal Aviation Corps of Lon-

don, Captain Mellor, in command of the new battleplane, told the young aviators that an aerial fleet was no longer a dream of romance. For France in reality possessed one, formed in divisions and squadrons, with battle aeroplanes, cruiser aeroplanes, scouts and torpedoplanes, all armored heavily and equipped with three-inch cannon and rapid fire guns.

"This, however, is the largest of the lot," said the captain, indicating the aerial dreadnought.

"There's some class to the aviation service now," remarked Billy, after hearing the officer's statement.

"And it is going to be the big factor in the future conduct of this war," significantly added the captain.

The boys had hoped for an invitation to ride in the mammoth battleplane, but its departure was too sudden to permit realization of this desire, and their own stay in the vicinity was nearer to conclusion than they imagined.

Logan and Cantrell had just received orders of recall to London when Billy and Henri returned to the British lines, and the lads were urged to be as lively as they could in getting the biplanes in proper shape for an extended flight.

"Wonder what's doing?" Billy had finished filling the biplane tanks with petrol, and capped the job with this question.

"Methinks, your majesty," jollied Henri, "that several times before have I heard this petition for knowledge. I must consult the crystal globe for answer."

"You'll have to get a move on you then," was the next remark of the Bangor boy, "for I see the bosses are headed this way."

Ready for the getaway, the young aviators hustled into their fleece-lined jackets and presented happy faces to Logan and Cantrell when the veterans arrived, girded up for traveling and fighting, if any of the latter diversion should be offered.

"You're a good pair to draw to," observed the bomb-maker, giving the boys a benevolent look over.

"He talks like an American sometimes," said Billy to himself, taking a grip on the guiding wheel of the aeroplane.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HERALDS OF TIMELY WARNING.

SAILING southward, and some sixty miles from the starting point, for the first time in the several recent flights, Henri detected engine trouble in the biplane he was driving, Cantrell also shouting warning to the pilot that something was wrong with the machinery. It was get down forthwith, and by volplaning.

This operation was skilfully performed, but none too soon, as the motor was lifeless when the landing was achieved.

Billy, from the other plane, working to the rear, saw the downshoot from its inception, and quickly surmised what was the matter. In the space of a couple of minutes he got to ground to join in the labor of repair.

"We must have sustained a jar from the train fire that you overlooked," Cantrell was saying to Henri when the other aviators reached the stranded craft.

"Didn't see a thing out of the way," insisted the

pilot, "when we were tuning up, though I'll admit that I had so much confidence in this machine that I might have taken something for granted."

"Thanks be it," fervently observed the gunner, "that it did not happen on two previous occasions I might mention."

"Didn't I tell you," replied Henri, "that if it wasn't a rabbit's foot it must have been some other charm that served your honorable self?"

The boy had no idea but that the machine could be easily fixed and the flight resumed in a few minutes.

It proved, though, a much more difficult task than he anticipated. A bullet had been grinding in the delicate mechanism, and necessitating a tedious process of replacing and repairing damaged parts.

The day was pretty far along at the time of the mishap, and the first regular stop in the flying program was considerably distant.

Even if everybody in the party knew his business, with extra parts in goodly supply and tool-boxes right at hand, it was a job of hours, not minutes.

Night was upon the workers before they finished, and as the wind then was strongly against their set course, Logan elected a bivouac until morning. With the dusk it had turned extremely cold, and the aviators, freely perspiring from their efforts to hurry the work of repair, were chilled through and

through by the icy gale bred above the faraway North Sea.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Logan, "a blaze for us, and as quick as we can start it."

No more desolate place imaginable than the spot upon which the aeroplanes had settled down. It was on the edge of a forest, about two-thirds of the wooded section wiped out by artillery fire, nothing but stumps, topless trees, or lifeless underbrush now covered with snow.

But the wherewith for the blaze proposed by Logan was in plenty, though that which was revealed by the upstarting flames denied the red display, with all its warmth, the title of cheery.

A look overhead sent a shiver through Billy that did not come from the frigid atmosphere. What he saw was a soldier's leg hanging from the knee over tree limb. Henri, too, coming hastily into the inner circle of firelight, was having his shudder at the same time. Passing through a trench nearby he had stumbled over a body half buried in the clay.

The boys had many times viewed war in its most dreadful forms, but in these drear surroundings, in the night, with the wind howling like a banshee; in this battle-swept forest, dead men and dead trees side by side, the impression was gruesome enough to shake even nerves of iron.

Cantrell and Logan were not wholly exempt from the uncanny sensation, but they were stoics in man-

ner and, enveloped in blankets from the biplane lockers and smoking pipes, they sat like Indians around a council fire.

A living demonstration would have brought these warriors to their feet for fierce resistance, but with the "silent ones" they wanted as little to do as possible.

There was no desire to sleep on the part of any member of the company, though they all partook of the food stores carried by the biplanes, and every one of them was prompt enough to replenish the fire whenever it showed the least sign of burning low.

"If it wasn't for the wind," said Henri, in undertone to his pal, "I wouldn't mind pushing on in the dark. Behind our searchlights it wouldn't be so bad."

"Some people would prefer the ground on a night like this," replied Billy, "but as for me, that's according to the location of the ground."

"From the look of conditions around here this place must have long been under terrific fire." It was Logan speaking, breaking into a still sitting of ten minutes or more, the only sounds in that period being the intermittent blasts of the wind and the crackling of twigs in the glowing bed of coals under the piled up mass of fuel.

"So rapid and continued, no doubt," ventured Cantrell, "that there was no show to put many of

the dead under the earth. I have an idea that we will be hearing some of it before we get out of this section."

"It will not be on this spot that we will stay to listen," was the hasty assurance of the other veteran. "Not beyond next daylight, anyhow."

Billy and Henri were mentally voting with the last speaker.

The first-named lad had risen from cramped position and started to pace up and down within the line of firelight. After a turn or two he suddenly paused, rigid and erect, with hand to ear.

The wind had shifted within the hour last past, blowing now directly from the north, and borne with it from afar a sound akin to the buzzing of a million bees.

"Hear that, Buddy?" Billy cried the question at his chum.

Henri did hear, and as he had first heard the same noise on the coast off Ostend.

"A Zeppelin, sure as you're born!" His answering cry was one of positive recognition.

Logan and Cantrell had scrambled to their feet at the first utterance from Billy, and shared in the straining uplook into the enshrouding blackness overhead.

Like a comet trailing its glittering length across the sky, the great dirigible was in the passing, wind-driven, and thousands of feet removed from earth.

"Going our way!" The reserved Logan had surrendered to the excitement of viewing the movement of one of those arch-disturbers of the British public, and against which the Royal Aviation Corps was ever strenuously arrayed.

"Get the stuff and yourselves aboard those machines like a shot," commanded the bomb-artist, himself bundling up blankets and hooking onto a tool-box like a sailor at a life boat. "Hurry, men, or we'll lose the trail of that infernal gas bag!"

"He isn't going to tackle that fort on wings, is he?" Billy asked of Cantrell, while the latter was adjusting the searchlight in the biplane.

"We're hardly fixed for a contact like that at the present writing," assured the gunner. "No, my boy, we're going to do the alarm act, if we can beat that gang to the coast."

"Beat 'em? Now, sir, you're talking on the race track. There's something wrong in the riding when a rig like this can't outdistance a Zeppelin."

The biplanes were going now at full speed, and though beyond the short range of the small searchlights there was nothing visible, the pilots, in the upper strata, had no fear of bumping into anything.

Occasional glimpses of the flashing trail of the Zeppelin comet keyed the zest of the chase to the limit, and called a whoop from Logan at every showing.

222 OUR YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS

The dry cold in the atmosphere had been succeeded by that chill dampness indicating near approach to the sea. The biplanes had been rapidly gaining on the airship ahead, and to conceal pursuit were now guided out of intercepting course, the purpose being to get the lead without being noticed. In the smaller craft the lights had been reduced to the one little glow bearing on the compass, and they flitted like shadows above the Channel, fully a thousand feet lower than the invading dirigible.

With the bow illuminants of the Zeppelin to the rear, Logan had all the assurance he needed that the biplanes had finally won the lead, though it required nearly eighty miles an hour, with wind aid, to do it.

More than once Billy had muttered to himself: "If anything should break, it's good night!"

But nothing broke except a package of signal rockets in the hands of Logan, and that was done purposely.

Woolwich, a battery point, got the first dazzle of a rainbow shower, and upon all the warships rained down a parti-colored stream of warning.

Cantrell by this time was doing some skyrocketing himself, and with admirable and impressive effect.

Powerful searchlights from a dozen different shore points turned night into day by their sweeping brilliancy, and the incoming Zeppelin in its

attempt to reach the mouth of the Thames passed above a veritable storm of explosives, in which it mixed some bombs of its own.

The biplanes had veered away from the shell tempest, the aviators appreciating the danger of concussion to the lighter craft, but though holding aloof for this reason, Logan and Cantrell were in constant readiness to pass the forward word to their pilots when the Zeppelin should decide to ascend to less disturbed strata, or, better still, if the aerial squadron from the Corps station should arrive in time to make an attack formidable enough to down the big envelope from the topside.

All the while the aircraft, large and small, were careering through space at lightning speed. Finding the reception rather more fervid than had been expected when the visit was of surprise-party intention, and an unusually well-aimed shot striking the forward part of the great vessel, the Zep. commander threw the elevating rudders to their extreme upward angle, and in a few minutes it was out of reach of damage-inflicting guns.

Discharging fifty-pound bombs at intervals, which started several fires along the trail, the mighty airship headed northward, and away from the searchlight area. Logan and Cantrell, shouting directions to their pilots, cleared the machine guns for action as the biplanes dashed forward and upward. From all directions now in the outside darkness

other aeroplanes were coming to join in the chase, their forelights flashing here and there like fireflies.

In the flying fight of a dozen miles, the incessant rattle of machine guns was punctuated by the heavier detonations of the answering Zep. cannon. But the departing airship had then gained such a height and was sailing at such tremendous speed, that the endeavor to override it in the black perspective was abandoned.

"Oh, for a bit of real daylight," lamented Logan, as he glared into the darkness ahead. Billy had nothing to say; the intense strain and overtaking had begun to tell upon him, and most welcome was the word to descend.

The landing was at Ipswich, where had assembled quite a number of the other aviators who had participated in the aerial combat. The Bangor boy's first look-about was for his chum, whom he discovered to be just as near "all in" as himself. When Lieutenant Morgan, who had led the aeroplane reinforcements from London, found the boys, they were stretched full length on the ground, sound asleep.

In a moment or two the officer had the young aviators on their feet and on the way to hot coffee and a real bed.

With Logan and Cantrell, these lads, unknowing, were this night elevated in glowing tribute by the airmen foregathered in Ipswich.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PERILOUS NIGHT JOURNEY.

AT the aviation station in London, several days subsequent to their trying service as heralds of timely warning, Our Young Aeroplane Scouts, fully rested and as chipper as ever, were asked by Lieutenant Morgan how they would like to take a run over to Paris, explaining that there were some new points of aviation being demonstrated just now in the French capital which would be of great interest to them and, technically reported, of considerable value to the British aerial corps.

It might have been that the absence of Demonet, now on a mission to the front, had opened the way for preference of the boys for this desirable assignment, and it also might have been that the kindly disposed officer just wanted to show his appreciation of what the young birdmen had done in the recent past, the risks they had encountered, and the high degree of efficiency they had shown as master pilots.

But no matter what the motive, the delighting

invitation had been extended, and joyfully accepted by the lads, all the more pleasing that they were to travel as free agents, together, and to go and come at their own will.

Still another pleasure thrilled in the every vein of Henri—he would see his mother, for the first time, and how long ago it seemed, since Billy and himself had brought to her the rescued fortune of the Trouvilles.

The trip was not to be one of aeroplane driving—somebody else would do the work while the boys looked out of car windows.

“From the talk I’ve heard around the station,” said Henri, when the chums were comfortably seated in a compartment of the London-Paris night express, “the Britons propose to do a lot of upbuilding in the way of aircraft, and maybe we’re doing something important, after all.”

“There’s one thing sure,” maintained Billy, “what we see we ought to be able to tell about, as far as aeroplanes are concerned.”

“Wouldn’t I like to bring back one of those can’t-be-seen rigs to show off.” The Trouville lad had been very much taken with the invisible craft that had carried them out of Lille.

Having no time limit set upon them, the boys had figured that their very first excursion in Paris would be to the house with the bronze lions in front, where

Henri's mother lived, and where they would probably stay while in the city.

And it was for there they started immediately after leaving the train, the French boy's heart counting an extra beat at every square nearer. It was a treat, indeed, to witness the meeting between mother and son, and Billy could hardly restrain the inclination to both laugh and cry. The gracious lady included the Bangor boy in the tender and glad welcome, and in such manner that the moisture did finally escape from his eyes.

The day following found the young flyers in the aviation field, a vast inclosure. Entering the field, a monster battleplane loomed up thirty feet high, with a number of planes stretching 130 feet across.

"The mate to the one we saw last week," instantly remarked Billy.

Further back was ranged the fleet of battle cruisers and scout planes. They were formed like a battalion, twenty planes in a row across the front and ten deep. Their huge wings made a front half a mile wide.

"Captain Mellor didn't miss it much when he told us this kind of thing was no longer a dream of romance," declared Henri, all wrought up by enthusiasm.

The battleplane and all the cruisers were armed heavily. Each carried both the three-inch cannon and the rapid-fire gun.

The boys had later a look-in upon the school where 100 military aviators were learning to navigate the new war craft.

To add to the interest of the exhibit, and wholly satisfying the critical inspection of Billy and Henri, the armed cruiser aeroplanes were brought out and put through tests high in the air. Each carried a cannon and each was capable of rising almost vertically from the ground at a speed of ninety miles an hour.

The boys had in mind that they had made the same straight upshoot themselves on more than one occasion.

Now continued the steady roar of the three-inch rifles as the cruisers circled far above. One of the most daring of the operators fired the big gun while plunging from side to side and dropping rapidly, in imitation of maneuvers while engaging the enemy.

"Wish these fellows could have seen Cantrell plugging into the sides of that supply train," commented Henri.

"But this show is a dandy one, just the same," volunteered Billy; "it's only play, to be sure, but pretty close to the real thing on points."

These battleplanes and cruisers, though only now in initial trial, were booked for the "real thing" soon enough, for movements in squadrons, both defensive and offensive. Each squadron, the boys

ascertained, would consist of nine aeroplanes of all types, including one battleplane, two battle cruisers and six scout planes, and the complement for a squadron upward of fifty officers and men, for the operation of the aeroplanes and their transportation on lorries drawn by automobiles, with which each squadron was to be equipped.

"It makes me feel quite chesty that I belong to this 'profesh,'" asserted Billy, as his chum and himself walked about the enclosure, minutely inspecting the various machines.

"I think we will be well loaded with information for the lieutenant when we get back," put in Henri. "But they didn't show, I notice, the transparent outfit."

"No matter, pal," consoled Billy, "we've had a private view of the wonder craft, and know how it works."

When the boys strolled again in the city streets they could not help noticing something of a difference in the aspect of the passing throng from what it generally was when they last visited Paris at the time of threatened siege. The people were smiling again.

Henri also noticed something else which caused him to pinch the elbow of his pal and to softly say: "Don't look back now, but there's a fellow dogging our steps, and he's been at it for a day or two. I remember seeing him in the London station when

we started, and here when we left the train; all the time yesterday he was still following us, I'm sure, but I paid no attention to it, thinking it only one of those accidental things of running across the same man more than once in a couple of days. Now he is again at our heels, and no mistake."

"The man, perhaps, imagines he is on the trail of high rollers in the money market," lightly observed Billy, but he heeded his chum's request not to look backwards.

"Don't be a jokesmith, Buddy, and I know you won't when I tell you I'm almost positive it is the big fellow with one shoulder lower than the other, who dressed up as a swell the night we were held up in that Charlotte street loft."

"Ah hah, and that's a different matter," hedged the Bangor boy, with a quick change of manner; "I remember the peculiar hunch of the party you mention. He was the one, too, who did the most guying of 'Happy.'"

"You've hit it," stated Henri, "and we'll fix it so you'll have a chance to judge for yourself whether or not he and the man behind us are one and the same person."

As if their attention were wholly absorbed by the shop windows, the boys walked slowly on until the corner and the next cross-street were reached, when all of a sudden Henri turned to the right and dodged

into the door of a store just beyond the turn, with Billy a close second.

The fact that the lads had seemed wholly unconscious that they were being shadowed, aided in the success of the quite simple ruse to verify the suspicion they were really entertaining.

Sure enough, the trailer in a minute appeared at the corner, hesitated, looked at the crossing and then up and down the thoroughfare he was facing. Billy, through the glass panels of the door, behind which the boys were in hiding, got his look at the man, and was just about as certain as his flying partner in recognition of the fellow with the sloping shoulder, which even adept padding could not conceal.

"You're right, Buddy," agreed the Bangor boy, "it's the very dress-suit actor we saw in the upstairs den, though he's sporting a mustache now."

"I'm just beginning to wonder," said Henri, keeping an eye all the while on the apparently puzzled tracker, "if the Roque crowd held us responsible for the raid that so soon followed our escape on the pipe line. If that's true, this fellow may be out for revenge."

"I hardly know what to think about that," was Billy's uncertain reply, "for Roque is a mighty good guesser, you know, and he must have figured that if we had given him away he would have heard

of it long before this. He has a way of finding out everything wherever he is."

"Anyhow, there's one of his crew watching us; you can't get away from that," asserted the Trouville lad.

"At least, we can try to get away from the man if not the fact," continued Billy, "and also get away from this door before one of the clerks fires us."

Just at this moment Henri missed the figure outside, shut out of line of vision by the passing throng, and was prompted to hook his hand in his chum's elbow and make a start up street with the moving crowd.

Finally congratulating themselves that they had gotten rid of the undesirable shadow, the boys headed into the boulevard in which was located their temporary home.

And little knowing, they, that their passing between the bronze lions was observed by a seemingly careless loungeur on the opposite side of the street.

Billy and Henri spent the early part of the evening comparing notes of the aircraft exhibit, Henri's mother an interested listener, while her slender fingers were busied with needlework intended to benefit some of the soldiers in the trenches, among whom were two more of her gallant sons.

The boys avoided any discussion relative to their experience with the persistent follower of crooked

shoulder identity, for they would have deemed it a sin to add one iota to the anxiety of that mother of fighters at the front.

Billy had just completed, with a stubby pencil, a number of entries in his notebook when a bell tinkled in the long hall between the drawing-room and the street door.

Directly the servant who had answered the summons announced the arrival of a messenger with a telegram for "Monsieur Barrie," and to be delivered only to him.

Billy grinned at the sound of "Barrie" and hastened to the door to receive the wired communication from a uniformed youth, who displayed his martial spirit by formal military salute.

When the boys had presented their credentials to the Paris authorities their prospective address had been taken, and the London office so advised. Lieutenant Morgan had also learned from Henri in advance where the young aviators could be reached.

The message was from the mentioned officer, and in effect that the presence of the lads was imperative in London on the morrow.

"To make official report, I suppose," remarked Henri, who was looking over his chum's shoulder at the reading of the message.

"It says we must be there; that's one thing sure," responded Billy, "and that means, too, we must leave Paris to-night."

"So soon?" This note of regret in the faltering voice of Henri's mother.

Saddened and greatly affected by the parting scene that ensued, the boys hardly exchanged an intelligible word during their taxicab ride to the station. Somehow the feeling prevailed that it would be a long time again before there would be another such reunion.

Sentiment, however, was abruptly succeeded in the big depot by another turn of mind, that of self-protection, for under a platform light the young aviators caught a glimpse of the haunting shape which they believed to have been baffled by their own cunning.

Worse, and more of it, the slope-shouldered Nemesis was not now alone. Two companion shadows stood with him waiting for the train.

The regular way of telling troubles to a policeman, or, in this instance, a gendarme, might appear as a practical solution, but what charge to prefer in like premises would be another matter.

Billy could no doubt recall an old saying in his home town—"never holler till you're hit."

The menacing party might have been properly provided with passports—no doubt they were—and there was such a thing as being detained as witnesses if any accusation could be made to stick.

So it came about that the young aviators went at the dilemma in the usual way with them—de-

pended on their own resources, and trusted to luck.

Both were convinced that whatever did happen, it would be on the train as it sped through the night, and if it was not killing it would be capture, and by some hook or crook forcible removal from the cars.

Henri had several gold-pieces in his inside pocket, and the magic of a coin gave first advantage to the boys.

The guard did not "crowd" the compartment which they occupied.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A VERY WARM RECEPTION.

FIFTY miles an hour was the speed schedule of the night express, and the swaying of the coaches soon indicated that the train was going at that speed, or better, with no stop on the time card inside of forty minutes from the starting signal. By virtue of Henri's coin the boys had a compartment to themselves, which, by second thought, was not altogether the safer plan for the threatened youths, provided the company was not an individual with a "game" shoulder and a couple more of his kind without the hump.

In corridor cars, and a sturdy conductor with a ticket punch and another of the straight-arm variety in his sleeve, showing up at the frequent intervals, a passenger disturbed had the ready remedy, for what the train boss did not supply the brakeman could.

But with roar and rattle and grinding of wheels, Billy and Henri, in their lock-box, might save **their** voices and look out for themselves in the event of

ugly intruders somehow "getting by" and at them. The boys well knew that the men seeking this opportunity would not hesitate a minute or balk at anything to accomplish whatever purpose they had in mind.'

Just when and how these daring operators, who carried their lives in their hands, as the practice of their perilous profession necessarily compelled them to do, would make their spring, was only a matter of nervous surmise and wearing suspense to the ones so menaced.

Billy had often declared that he would "rather scrap with three men in the open than one in the bush." And here there were three in the "bush" and none at all in the "open."

Three stops had now been made by the train, and at the more populous points on the French side of the Channel, and as evidence that the second-class compartments were in growing demand, the guard was compelled, however he willed it, to give his generous tipster and the other partner, another sharer of their seat space.

Queer enough, this addition was made at a junction where the trains, up and down, met, and where both locomotives halted to take on water. It was a small station, of no other railway consequence than this proceeding.

The incoming passenger was not particularly burdened with grip baggage, and not much outwardly

for style, though his ungloved hands, the boys noticed when the man turned down the upstanding collar of a shabby, baggy ulster, were remarkably well cared for, carefully pared and polished nails, and a large seal-ring adorning one of the fingers.

Another sizing up of the stranger by Henri, in his favorite pastime of character study, unfolded the fact that the newcomer had very black eyes and very white teeth, which latter he showed in a smiling nod to the first occupants of the compartment.

Billy, on still another line of quiet and close inspection, was convinced that their fellow passenger had something else in the two-sided slit pockets of his greatcoat than a pipe or a handkerchief. The Bangor boy had seen that certain kind of bulge too often to mistake the resting place of shooting-irons. This line of detection was his long suit.

Unaccountably and instinctively, the lads jointly had a sort of confidence in and liking for this five-minute acquaintance, and not the least apprehension that he in any manner was identified with the cat and mouse game they knew was in playing. Considerable concession, when it is considered that Billy and Henri were then inclined to be suspicious of everything and everybody.

Somehow or other, the boys were also impressed that the stranger restrained a desire to laugh when he politely asked them if they lived in London or

Paris, and when he volunteered the statement that he had employment in the British metropolis.

Without pause, Billy frankly advanced the information that they lived chiefly under their caps, but were anchored for the time being in London.

"I take it," pleasantly observed the late acquaintance, "that you are not with the colors, that is, members of any regiment."

"I'll admit that we are not registered with the Royal Blues or the Iron Grays, or what you will, but I'll not deny but what we've seen some service," was the response of the Bangor boy.

A long shriek of the locomotive whistle cut in on Billy's remark, and the train gradually came to a halt.

"Somebody must have turned the red light on the driver," suggested Henri, peering through the car window, "I don't see any station; it's dark on my side, anyhow."

"It is a connection point, I believe," said the stranger; "there's a platform further up the track, and, perhaps, a wait, if the other train happens to be late, and"—the manner of the man changed like a flash—in an instant he went to his knees between the crosswise seats, then almost full length on the floor below the window sill. In this recumbent position he turned over, and from his deep-set eyes he shot an up-glance at the startled boys which con-

veyed as plain as spoken word that trouble was imminent.

The young aviators, ever quick-witted, accepted the cue for all it was worth and in full understanding. They calmly leaned back in the car seat, surface pictures of patient waiting, but literally trembling with inward excitement, tempered, however, by the steadfast belief that there was a human volcano at their feet, which would erupt at the right moment.

The coach in which this scene was being enacted was fourth and next to the last back of the locomotive, quite a little distance from the platform high-lamps. Near the window, at Billy's right, brought in view by a slight pull of the train forward, a switchlight gleamed, and by this was revealed the cause of the sudden drop of the man in the ulster.

Two muffled figures were supporting a third between their shoulders, bringing the face of the hoisted individual on a level with the window-pane. This acrobatic performance was taking place in the narrow and dark space dividing the halted passenger coaches from a cut of freight cars, standing on a side-track. The trainmen had evidently gone forward to the station for orders, and it was a rare chance for the "shadows" to play trumps.

They had reckoned, however, and no doubt, of making easy work of their designs upon the boys,

and it was about sure that they had not been enlightened as to a new element in the project, for when the mysterious passenger dropped out of view from the outside he must have been aware that his was the first look.

Having exactly located the lads they were after, the next move of the conspirators was to gain ingress to the compartment, and before the wait of the train was terminated, which was likely to occur at any minute. There must have been an expert on the job, for two of the assaulting party were in reaching distance of the boys in a brace of shakes, and Billy and Henri braced themselves for a hand-to-hand fight in the narrow quarters.

But before the plucky youngsters could strike a blow, and before a single clutch or stroke could deprive them of their power of defense, there was an uprising at the rear, a tall figure towering above their sparring attitude, and the smash of a revolver-butt that shattered the wrist of the nearest intruder, who tumbled backward with a hoarse cry of rage and pain.

The strange passenger then went at the second car-breaker like a tiger, to be met with some of his own quality of fighting prowess, and a fierce struggle ensued, resulting in both combatants falling out of the car and rolling, in maddened embrace, in the cinders at the trackside.

Their champion was uppermost, when Billy saw

their persistent trailer, he of the sloping shoulder, jump into the fray, an iron spike in hand upraised for a finishing blow on the head of the topmost fighter.

The Bangor boy, in making a hasty step to get out and down from the running board of the coach, struck his foot against something on the floor, which proved to be the wrist-breaking weapon which the strenuous user had dropped when he tackled his second adversary.

Billy made a lightning reach for the gun, got a bead on the arm swinging the spike, but delayed in downward action for fear of hitting friend instead of foe, so lively was the renewed squirming, and pumped shot after shot at the muscular target. Hit or miss, the marksman never knew, but he broke up the mêlée just the same, and saved his new friend from a combined attack that could have had only one ending.

The revolver detonations brought a swarm of train and station employees and every bystander in the vicinity pell-mell to the spot where the racket was going on. The fellow on the underside of the boys' champion worked some cute wrestling trick on the latter, broke hold and ran like a deer across the network of rails and into the darkness beyond, followed by quick-firing from the remaining revolver pulled from ulster pocket by its owner.

Neither of the companions of the sprinter was in sight. They had made their getaway first.

In the hunt that was immediately instituted, there was nothing doing in the way of capture or even a warm trail past the first highroad to the west. One of the leading pursuers claimed that he had heard the chugging of a motor-car on the highway, but he was the only witness with ears so acute. The telegraph wires were also freely used in endeavor to head off the fugitives, but when the train resumed its speedy way to Calais, no results were of record.

That the boys were not going to lose the company of their guardian was made manifest by his reappearance at the last moment in the compartment.

It was not until the passing of the Channel and London had been reached that Billy and Henri got a line on the identity and the opportune interference in their behalf of this live wire, and the interesting information was given in the hearty voice of none other than Detective Horatio Adams of Scotland Yard.

“ ‘Gentleman Joe’ Crosbie, I’ll have you know, my lads, is the good scout alongside whom you are standing, and who was standing by you awhile back. We received the tip to look out for those fellows and for you in time to send one of the finest in the Yard across to meet the up express to Calais—and I don’t have to tell you the rest.”

“How could anybody have known that we were

being shadowed, when we didn't tell a soul?" demanded Billy, still curious.

"There is such a thing as watchers being watched," intimated Adams, with a wink at Crosbie. "And, let me also say, my young air sailors, that you didn't tell me everything in connection with your adventure in Charlotte Street. But let bygones be bygones; you did me a mighty good turn when you brought the little box from my friend Ardelle, and that big fish you forgot to mention is still among us, so I've my chance to get him yet."

"How was it that the gang that tried to get us in and out of Paris were not pinched there, if they were known?" This was Henri's question.

"That's not in our territory, my son," replied the Scotland Yarder, "and besides, it is not part of our business to give reasons for this or that."

"Enough said, sir," exclaimed the Trouville lad. "We owe this gentleman and yourself a whole lot. But for the aid we got we would have been either killed or kidnaped."

"Not as bad as killing, my boy," assured Adams, "I think the prime mover in the deal just wanted you to comfort him in his old age."

"We know what he wanted," put in Billy, "and that is, to win prizes with us in a beauty show."

"G'wan," as my friend Devlin would say, and good-bye." Adams held out his hand for a shake.

"Good-bye?" You're not expecting to die, are

you, old top?" The Bangor boy did not quite understand the note of finality in the detective's parting words.

But it all came out in a visit to the Admiralty the next morning, and what happened can be ascertained by reading the next volume in this series—*"Our Young Aeroplane Scouts in Italy; or, Flying with the War Eagles of the Alps."*

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